

Celt and Saxon: Interaction in pre-Viking Britain, c.600-800

Volume II

by

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Part 3

Mercia and the Britons of Wales

Chapter 10

Mapping the Territory of the Mercians and Britons of Wales

Mercians and Angles of the West Midlands

In contrast to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Wessex and Northumbria, there exists no early medieval origin legend for the formation of the kingdom of Mercia, nor even one for the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in the West Midlands.¹ Later kings of Mercia claimed descent from semi-legendary figures who hailed from the Continent – as exemplified in the genealogy of Æthelred found in the Anglian Collection,² and in Felix's *Life of St Guthlac*.³ However, no surviving narrative provides any basis for explaining when and in what circumstances Anglo-Saxons made their way into the region. This is a result of the general lack of primary source material that has survived from Mercia.⁴ There are no native annals or narrative histories. Though the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* provide some information, neither displays much interest in, or knowledge of, the early history of the region.⁵ Bede did not list a single Mercian amongst his informants,⁶ and appears to have gained his information indirectly through the Northumbrian monastery of Lastingham, which had supplied an early bishop for Mercia.⁷

¹ P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 16; B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), p. 101. I have not here considered material regarding the origins of Mercia which is to be found in post-Conquest annalistic sources such as Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum* and the two *Flores historiarum* compiled by Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris. This material, which has been reconstructed by W. Davies, 'Annals and the origin of Mercia', in A. Dornier (ed.), *Mercian Studies* (Leicester, 1977), pp. 17-29, suggests an invasion of the Midlands from East Anglia in the early sixth century under various unnamed *procures* or chiefs. However, as pointed out by N. Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', in Bassett, *Origins*, pp. 162-3, these sources are very late and it is not clear if the early entries are anything more than 'inventive conjectures' on the part of their authors.

² D.N. Dumville, 'The Anglian collection of royal genealogies and regnal lists', *ASE* 5 (1976), pp. 30-7.

³ In *VG* 2, one *Icel* is mentioned as the founder of the royal dynasty. The same figure, rendered as *Icil*, appears five generations above Penda in the Anglian Collection.

⁴ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 159; M.P. Brown & C.A. Farr, 'Introduction: Mercia, a culture in context', *idem.* (eds.), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), p. 1; M. Gelling, 'The early history of western Mercia', in Bassett, *Origins*, p. 184; C. Hart, 'The kingdom of Mercia', in Dornier, *Mercian Studies*, p. 59; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 23, 100.

⁵ S. Bassett, 'How the west was won: the Anglo-Saxon takeover of the west midlands', *ASSAH* 11 (2000), p. 111.

⁶ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 159; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 100.

⁷ *HE* Preface, IV.3. This bishop was the Irish-trained Chad (*supra.*, p. 327).

It may be that the absence of a surviving origin legend for Mercia and the Angles of the West Midlands is attributable to the lack of any particular event, action or 'heroic deed' which proclaimed their arrival. The West Saxons could trace their dynastic origins to boatloads of conquering heroes from the Continent; the Northumbrians have an albeit tenuous link with Gildas's *foederati* stationed in the north to protect erstwhile *Britannia* from the Picts and the Scots. Mercia, on the other hand, seems not to have originated out of a primary beachhead or line of advance for the invading Anglo-Saxons. Rather, it was a secondary establishment, a coalescence of several disparate groups of Anglo-Saxon colonisers who had gradually moved westwards from the longer-occupied lands in the east.⁸ Accordingly, no grand tale of conquest that could be attached to the formation of Mercia or any of the West Midland polities has been handed down.⁹

That said, Bede did include the Mercians in his account of the origins of the Anglo-Saxon peoples and their kingdoms.¹⁰ They were counted as Angles, that is from 'the country ... which is called *Angulus*', which has been identified as the East Holstein region of Germany, along with the East and Middle Angles, the Northumbrians, and those whom Bede called 'the other Anglian peoples [*ceterique Anglorum populi*]'.¹¹ At the very least, this indicates that when Bede was writing there was a view that the Mercians shared a similar sense of 'homeland' with the other kingdoms included as part of Bede's 'Angle-dom'.¹² Bede also drew a distinction between what he referred to as the 'southern [and] northern Angles [*meridiani et septentrionales Anglorum populi*]', who were separated by the River Humber.¹³ This implies that there was also some recognition of difference amongst the people identified as Angles, at least in a geographical sense, though such a conceptualisation could have been Bede's invention so as to emphasize the distinctiveness of Northumbria.¹⁴ In any event, it can be reasonably supposed that the rulers of Mercia at least, and of any other West Midland peoples, saw themselves as being in some sense akin to the other Anglian dynasties.

⁸ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', pp. 160-2; S. Keynes, 'Mercia', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 306; H. Kleinschmidt, 'Beyond conventionality: recent work on the Germanic migration to the British Isles', *Studi Medievali* 3rd Series 36 (1995), p. 998; B. Yorke, 'The origins of Mercia', in Brown & Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, p. 15.

⁹ Kleinschmidt, 'Beyond conventionality', p. 992.

¹⁰ *HE* I.15 (*supra.*, pp. 45, 143).

¹¹ N.J. Higham, *Kingdom of Northumbria AD 350-1100* (Gloucestershire, 1993), p. 69; Kleinschmidt, 'Beyond conventionality', pp. 992-3.

¹² P. Sims-Williams, 'The settlement of England in Bede and the Chronicle', *ASE* 12 (1983), p. 24; Yorke, 'The origins of Mercia', p. 14.

¹³ *HE* I.25.

¹⁴ J. Hines, 'The becoming of the English: identity, material culture and language', *ASSAH* 7 (1994), p. 51.

Anglo-Saxon expansion into the region of Mercia and the West Midlands represented a secondary line of advance which occurred after occupation of the eastern regions. Archaeological evidence of Anglo-Saxon burials from the sub-Roman period suggests a limited presence in the east of Britain prior to c.450, and then only between the Thames and the Humber.¹⁵ Burial sites datable to the second half of the fifth century demonstrate a more extensive distribution and include sites in the direction of the Midlands around Watling Street and the Trent Valley.¹⁶ When burial sites including the first quarter of the sixth century are taken into account there is further expansion, with those in the west extending along the upper reaches of the Thames and its tributaries, along the Avon in the direction of the Severn at Stretton-on-Fosse and Wasperton (Warwicks.), and farther along the Trent Valley around Stretton and as far west as Catholme and Wychnor near Barton-under-Needwood (Staffs.).¹⁷ The burial evidence thus supports what Steven Bassett refers to as a steady movement of Anglo-Saxons into the West Midlands from the late fifth century onwards, along three principal 'routes of entry': across the Cotswolds from the Thames Valley, along the Warwickshire Avon, and via the Trent Valley.¹⁸

There appears to have been little expansion of Anglo-Saxon influence for the remainder of the sub-Roman period, at least as far as can be demonstrated by burial evidence; rather, there is further growth of the distribution of burial sites within the limits of the existing expansion. There are, for instance, no excavated pagan Anglo-Saxon burials west of the Severn in Herefordshire; the most westerly examples are around Bredon Hill (Worcs.) near the Avon-Severn confluence.¹⁹ Nor have any burials been found in Shropshire or Cheshire.²⁰ There are also relatively few pagan burials in the West

¹⁵ *Supra.*, pp. 43-4, 144-5.

¹⁶ J. Hines, 'Philology, archaeology and the *adventus Saxonum vel Anglorum*', in A. Bammesberger & A. Wollmann (eds.), *Britain 400-600: Language and History* (Heidelberg, 1990), p. 27.

¹⁷ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', pp. 161-2; M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 31, 40; Hines, 'Philology, archaeology and the *adventus Saxonum vel Anglorum*', p. 28; S. Losco-Bradley & H.M. Wheeler, 'Anglo-Saxon settlement in the Trent Valley: some aspects', in M. Faull, (ed.), *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 102-112; K. Nurse, 'Awkward angles: ancestral burial ground indicates gradual acculturation from British to Anglo-Saxon society', *History Today* 43, no. 7 (1993), pp. 3-4; K. Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', in Bassett, *Origins*, p. 173.

¹⁸ S. Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands: the transition from British to Anglo-Saxon control', in J. Blair & R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), p. 15; *idem.*, 'How the west was won', p. 113.

¹⁹ Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', pp. 175, 181; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 20, 23, 67. The burials at Wyre Piddle and Upton Snodsbury (Worcs.), just to the north of Bredon Hill, are the most westerly in the region.

²⁰ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 29. A possible exception is at Bromfield (Salop). See Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 67.

Midlands *east* of the Severn which can be dated to the *second* half of the sixth century, and almost none from the seventh century.²¹ This may suggest a change in burial practice away from furnished inhumations and cremations – a change which would thus have occurred rather earlier here than in other parts of Anglo-Saxon England, perhaps due to contact with the native Britons of the region.²² The relative lack of identified pagan burials might also indicate that *ethnic* Anglo-Saxons were a minority in the region, and increasingly so deeper into the West Midlands, a view which has gained increasing support within the secondary literature.²³ The archaeology does reveal a level of consistency in the grave-goods found in the West Midlands with those uncovered in the East Midlands, and indeed across most of the territory of Bede's Anglian England.²⁴

The dominant kingdom of the Midlands for most of the pre-Viking period was Mercia. The name for the kingdom of the Mercians – OE *Mierce* – derives from the root *mearc*, meaning a 'boundary' or 'border land', thus giving the colloquial translation of 'borderers' or 'dwellers on the march'.²⁵ This was the only name known to Bede for the kingdom, and no evidence has survived for any other early name, such as was the case for the West Saxon house of the Gewisse.²⁶ The term *Subanhymbre* – Southumbrians – is found in some entries of the northern recension of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.²⁷ However, it is probable that this was a later invention coined in response to the development of a self-conscious Northumbria, and not an early name for Mercia.²⁸ If

²¹ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 16; *idem.*, 'How the west was won', p. 113; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 64.

²² Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 113; Hines, 'Philology, archaeology and the *adventus Saxonum vel Anglorum*', p. 28. These changes in burial practice may not reflect conversion to Christianity, and will be discussed in a Chapter 13 (*infra.*, pp. 434-5).

²³ Bassett, 'How the west was won', pp. 113-4; John Blair (pers. comm., 8 November, 2001); Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 31, 48; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 23.

²⁴ Bassett, 'How the west was won', pp. 113-14. Hines, 'The becoming of the English', pp. 52-3, for example, draws our attention to a type of dress-fastener, known as a wrist-clasp or sleeve-clasp, which is found overwhelmingly in Anglian areas, but only rarely elsewhere. Some support is thus provided, so far as it goes, for there having been a distinct Anglian group-identity. However, some diversity and regional variation within this culture should also be allowed, as argued for example by Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 30-48, and Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 19, on the basis of burials excavated in the Avon Valley where the kingdom of the Hwicce (*infra.*, pp. 375-6) emerged in the seventh century. This includes a preference for orienting inhumations on a north-south axis.

²⁵ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 160; Hines, 'The becoming of the English', p. 51; Keynes, 'Mercia', p. 306.

²⁶ *Supra.*, p. 45.

²⁷ For example, ASC MS E. s.aa. 449, 641, 697, 702.

²⁸ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 160. In some charters from the first half of the eighth-century, Æthelbald is styled as *rex Suutanglorum* (S89/BCS154), or *rex Suthanglorum*

the translation of the Mercians as 'dwellers on the march' is accurate, the natural presumption is that they were called that because their territory abutted that of the Britons of Wales, and modern opinion favours this identification.²⁹ The Mercians, therefore, can be conceptualised as the people who were located on the edge of Anglo-Saxon westward expansion during the sub-Roman period, and who appear to have developed a self-conscious identity as frontier-dwellers or pioneers.³⁰

That said, the geographical bounds of Mercia are not easy to define. It is not certain from any of the surviving written sources where the original nucleus of Mercia lay, and indeed whether there is necessarily any direct link between the Anglo-Saxons who left the pagan burials in the West Midlands and the Mercian kingdom and dynasty.³¹ The Mercians head the list of peoples in the *Tribal Hidage*.³² Their territory, specifically recorded as that 'which is called the first [land] of the Mercians [*þær mon ærest myrcna hæf*]', was assessed at 30,000 hides. Nicholas Brooks has argued that this 'first land' of the Mercians comprised much of the modern counties of Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, along with southern Derbyshire and northern Warwickshire.³³ Bede, in his account of the death of Æthelfrith of Northumbria, c.616, said that the River Idle, which flows into the Trent approximately five kilometres north of Gainsborough (Lincs.), was considered to lie within the limits of Mercian territory.³⁴ Bede also said

(S101/BCS163). But in others, this style is listed after and subsidiary to *rex Mercensium* (S89/BCS154; S94/BCS157), suggesting that his primary identification was as king of the Mercians. See B. Yorke, 'The vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon overlordship', *ASSAH* 2 (1981), pp. 186-7.

²⁹ For example, Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 162; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 79; Keynes (1999a), p. 306; Yorke, 'The origins of Mercia', p. 19. This was the view followed by Sir Frank Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1943), p. 40. P. Hunter Blair, 'The Northumbrians and their southern frontier', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4th Series 26 (1948), pp. 112-26, had expressed the alternative belief that the boundary in question was in fact with the Northumbrians (based on Bede's differentiation between the south and north Angles). But, as noted by Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 102, in the seventh century, the Mercians and the Northumbrians were separated by the peoples known in the *Tribal Hidage* as the *Pecsætna* and the *Elmedsætna*, not to mention the *Lindesfarona* (of Lindsey) and the *Haeth feldlanda* (of Hatfield). Given that the Mercians were also included in the *Tribal Hidage*, it is unlikely that they would have shared a border with the Northumbrians during the period when the name was coined.

³⁰ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 16-17; N.J. Higham, 'King Cearl, the battle of Chester and the origins of the Mercian "overkingship"', *Midland History* 16 (1992), p. 11; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 102. Keynes, 'Mercia', p. 306, has cautioned, however, that much thought was not necessarily given to what lay beyond the eponymous boundary, the *mearc*, of the Mercians. It is also unclear if the name was originally self-referential or one applied by others.

³¹ Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 114; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 31; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 102.

³² See D.N. Dumville, 'The Tribal Hidage: an introduction to its texts and their history', in Bassett, *Origins*, pp. 225-30.

³³ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', pp. 160-1. On mapping the territory of the Mercians using the *Tribal Hidage*, see also Hart, 'The kingdom of Mercia', pp. 52-4.

³⁴ *HE* II.12. See also Keynes, 'Mercia', p. 306.

that in the period after Oswiu's victory over Penda of Mercia in 655, the kingdom was divided by the River Trent into that of the North Mercians, assessed at 7,000 hides, and that of the South Mercians, assessed at 5,000 hides.³⁵ When this division occurred is not established, nor whether it pertained only to Oswiu's brief rulership over the Mercians, but it does suggest that the Trent flowed through the centre of the kingdom.³⁶ This accords with the general view that, if there was such a thing as a Mercian 'heartland', it would be found in the vicinity of the Middle Trent in Staffordshire and southern Derbyshire.³⁷ It is in this area that several historical *foci* of the Mercian kingdom are located, namely, the first Mercian see at Lichfield, the royal monastery at Repton, and the royal *vill* at Tamworth.³⁸

The date by which the kingdom of Mercia came into being must be relegated to the shadowy world of sub-Roman pre-history. It is probable that Mercia was an agglomeration of several early groups of peoples which came to be dominated by a particular line of powerful rulers.³⁹ The earliest known 'king of the Mercians [*rex Merciorum*]' was Cearl, whose daughter Cwenburh was said by Bede to have married Edwin of Northumbria when he was in exile prior to c.616;⁴⁰ but Bede is his only witness.⁴¹ The earliest common ancestor in the four surviving genealogies of the Mercian kings contained in the Collection is Pybba, the father of Penda.⁴² Penda, who ruled c.630-655 and was said by Bede to be 'a most energetic man of the royal house of Mercia [*vir strenuissimo de regio genere Merciorum*]',⁴³ is the first king of the

³⁵ *HE* III.24.

³⁶ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 161.

³⁷ Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 114; Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', pp. 161-2; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 31; Keynes, 'Mercia', p. 307; Losco-Bradley & Wheeler, 'Anglo-Saxon settlement in the Trent Valley', pp. 101-2; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 102, 106; Yorke, 'The origins of Mercia', pp. 19-20.

³⁸ For the see of Lichfield, established c.669, refer to *HE* IV.3; *VW* 15. The monastery of Repton is attested at the earliest in the grant of the *princeps* Frithuric (S1805/BCS842), dated to c.675x692 by the reign of Æthelred I of Mercia who was a witness. The *vill* at Tamworth is attested in various charters of the late eighth and early ninth centuries which were issued from there (e.g. S120/BCS239; S121/BCS240; S133/BCS259; S155/BCS296; S163/BCS326). Tamworth might also be identified with the otherwise unlocated *Tomtun*, where Æthelred I of Mercia issued a charter 675x692 (S1804/BCS843). See J. Blair, 'Tamworth', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 439.

³⁹ *Supra.*, p. 370.

⁴⁰ *HE* II.14. For a highly speculative discussion on the *floruit* of Cearl, see Higham, 'King Cearl, the battle of Chester and the origins of the Mercian "overkingship"', pp. 1-15.

⁴¹ Keynes, 'Mercia', p. 307; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 102.

⁴² Dumville, 'The Anglian collection of royal genealogies and regnal lists', pp. 30-7; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 101; *idem.*, 'The origins of Mercia', p. 18.

⁴³ *HE* II.20.

Mercians for whom any relatively reliable dates survive.⁴⁴ According to the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, Penda was 'the first to separate the kingdom of the Mercians from the kingdom of the Northerners [*ipse primus separavit regnum Merciorum a regno Nordorum*]',⁴⁵ This account probably just indicates that Penda was seen by the Britons as the one who resisted the expansionism of Northumbrian *imperium*-wielders like Edwin and Oswald.⁴⁶ So far as can be discerned, therefore, it appears that the kingdom of the Mercians emerged in the late sixth or early seventh century.⁴⁷

Mercia continued to grow through the seventh and eighth centuries and came to exercise dominion over various other Anglo-Saxon peoples. For much of the pre-Viking period, there appears to have been a distinction between the kingdom that was ruled directly by the kings of Mercia and surrounding territories that had a separate identity but ultimately came under Mercian overlordship.⁴⁸ Of these territories, several can be located in the West Midlands along the shifting border with the Britons of Wales, though none is well-defined, either in terms of origins and ethnic make-up, or in terms of surviving evidence.

The best-defined of these Mercian 'satellites', which may at some early stage have bordered the Britons of Wales, is the kingdom of Hwicce.⁴⁹ Assessed in the *Tribal Hidage* at 7,000 hides (the same as for Essex and Sussex), the Hwicce (or *Hwinca*) are generally thought to have been located east of the Severn Estuary in territory encompassing Gloucester, Worcester and extending up the Avon Valley into south-western Warwickshire.⁵⁰ Here they may have abutted the *Arosætan* to the east, a minor

⁴⁴ HE II.20, III.24; ASC s.aa. 626, 633, 655; HB 64. There is greater certainty as to when Penda died, than when he came to power. For a discussion of Penda's dates, see Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', pp. 164-6.

⁴⁵ HB 65.

⁴⁶ S. Keynes, 'Penda', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, pp. 361-2. Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 166, and D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991), p. 65, note that Mercia can hardly have been subject to Northumbria in Cearl's time if he married his daughter to the exiled Edwin.

⁴⁷ Yorke, 'The origins of Mercia', pp. 18-19. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 25, states that the virtual silence regarding Mercia in the HE, ASC and HB until Penda's time, might indicate that it was not until his reign that Mercia became important enough to be noticed as an enemy or ally.

⁴⁸ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', in Brown & Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, pp. 94-5; Hart, 'The kingdom of Mercia', p. 43; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 6. The eighth-century kings Æthelbald and Offa, for example, were first and foremost kings of Mercia, but also rulers of a wider hegemony. See note 28 (*supra.*, pp. 372-3).

⁴⁹ Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 108.

⁵⁰ S. Bassett, 'In search of the origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', in *idem.*, *Origins*, p. 6; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 1, 31; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western*

people also included in the Tribal Hidage and assessed at 600 hides.⁵¹ The name of the kingdom has been linked to OE *hwicce* 'ark, chest'.⁵² The inclusion of the Hwicce in the *Hidage* may suggest that the polity was formed in the seventh century.⁵³ However, the fact that the Hwicce are not included in the primary list of peoples in the *Hidage*, but rather begin the secondary list, suggests that the name could have been added at some later time.⁵⁴ The Hwicce have been seen as a creation of Penda of Mercia, after his victory over the West Saxons at Cirencester in 628,⁵⁵ but there is little evidence to support this, and it is possible that the kingdom did not come into being until around the middle of the seventh century.⁵⁶ While Bede says that the meeting with the British bishops at Augustine's Oak in 603 was 'on the borders of the Hwicce and the West Saxons',⁵⁷ it is possible that he was locating this meeting place anachronistically. The first king (*rex*) of the Hwicce mentioned by Bede is Osric.⁵⁸ In the corrupted foundation charter for the monastery at Bath which is dated to c.675, Osric is also styled as *rex*, but is said to have acted under the consent of Æthelred I of Mercia (675-704).⁵⁹ Further charters of the eighth century demonstrate the persistence of Hwicce as a kingdom for most of the pre-Viking period, albeit subordinate to Mercia.⁶⁰ By the end of that century its rulers had lost their royal power and the former kingdom was administered as a Mercian ealdormanry.⁶¹

England, pp. 5, 31, 89. Bassett and Sims-Williams argue that the kingdom of Hwicce was probably coterminous with the diocese of Worcester, founded c.680, and so may have included some land west of the Severn. Indeed, a charter of 718x745 refers to Worcester as the *metropolis* of the Hwicce (S1254/BCS166), and bishops of Worcester were known to style themselves 'bishops of the Hwicce [*episcopi Hwicciorum*]' (e.g. S1324/BCS1239 of 969; S1352/KCD649 of 985). On the diocese of Worcester, see J. Barrow, 'Worcester', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, pp. 488-90.

⁵¹ The *Arosætan* appear four places after the Hwicce in the *Tribal Hidage* and have been associated with the Warwickshire Arrow. See Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 85; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 31.

⁵² Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 30, posits that OE *hwicce* could refer to the appearance of the Severn valley bounded by the Cotswold and Malvern hills being like an ark.

⁵³ The suggested date of the *Tribal Hidage* ranges from the seventh to ninth centuries (*supra.*, pp. 174-5).

⁵⁴ N.J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, 1995), p. 89.

⁵⁵ *ASC* s.a.

⁵⁶ Bassett, 'In search of the origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', p. 6; Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 167; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 7. *Contra* G. Jones, 'Penda's footprint? Place-names containing personal names associated with those of early Mercian kings', *Nomina* 21 (1998), p. 32, who notes a concentration of place-names in the region of the Hwicce preserving the personal names of Penda, and his forebears Pybba and Creoda.

⁵⁷ *HE* II.2, 'in confinio Huicciurum et Occidentalium Saxonum'.

⁵⁸ *HE* IV.23. Bede also states, in the context of Wilfrid's evangelisation of the South Saxons of c.680, that their queen Eaba was of the Hwicce, and he names her brother Eanhere and father Eanfrith (*HE* IV.13). These men may have flourished prior to the reign of Osric. See Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 34, 58.

⁵⁹ S51/BCS43, pp. 218-23.

⁶⁰ For example, S89/BCS154 of 736; S55/BCS183 of c.757; S56/BCS187 of 759; S113/BCS223 of c.778.

⁶¹ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 39; B. Yorke, 'Hwicce', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 246.

Also listed in the *Tribal Hidage*, directly after Mercia, and more closely positioned near the border with the Britons of Wales, are the people called the *W(r)ocensætna* or *Wreocensætan*. This name is generally taken to mean ‘dwellers around the Wrekin’ and thought to share the same etymological derivation as *Viroconium*, the original name for Wroxeter (Salop).⁶² Assessed at 7,000 hides, the *Wreocensætan* must have been of some importance, though there is no evidence that the polity ever attained the status of a kingdom but rather may have been a region administered politically and ecclesiastically from Mercia.⁶³ It has been suggested that their territory encompassed much of present-day Shropshire, ranging northwards as far as the natural barrier of the Ellesmere moraine and southwards to Wenlock Edge.⁶⁴ A charter of 963 records a grant of land just north of Wenlock Edge, including a pasture at Plaish (near Cardington), which was said to be ‘*in provincia Wrocensetna*’.⁶⁵ The name also appears in an earlier charter, of 855.⁶⁶ These charters suggest the survival of an identified district of the *Wreocensætan* beyond the pre-Viking period. However, its origins are less clear, and beyond the *Tribal Hidage* it is not otherwise referred to in the pre-Viking period.⁶⁷

Between the *Wreocensætan* and the Hwicce lies territory west of the Severn in Herefordshire and southern Shropshire that is commonly associated with the *Magonsætan*, perhaps the most misunderstood of the early Anglo-Saxon polities of the West Midlands. Despite the frequency with which the *Magonsætan* are associated with the early Anglo-Saxon period and placed on maps of Anglo-Saxon England,⁶⁸ there is

⁶² Bassett, ‘How the west was won’, p. 112; Pretty, ‘Defining the Magonsæte’, pp. 174, 179. M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past – Place-names and the History of England* (London, 1978), p. 57, states these names are derived from the Romano-British *Uroconio*. S. Bassett, ‘Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter and its British antecedents’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 145 (1992), p. 20, offers ‘dwellers at (or near) *Viroconium*’.

⁶³ P. Featherstone, ‘The Tribal Hidage and the ealdormen of Mercia’, in Brown & Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, p. 31; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 83; Pretty, ‘Defining the Magonsæte’, p. 174.

⁶⁴ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 51, 83; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 44.

⁶⁵ S723/BCS1119, issued under Edgar, king of England, 957-975.

⁶⁶ S206/BCS487, issued under Burgred, king of Mercia, 852-874. In the charter, Viking raiders (‘pagans’) were said to be marauding ‘*in Wrecensetum*’.

⁶⁷ The possibility of the *Wreocensætan* being a British creation, as suggested by Bassett, ‘How the west was won’, p. 116, and Higham, *An English Empire*, p. 85, will be considered in Chapter 12 (*infra.*, p. 423-5).

⁶⁸ For example, J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1991), p. 52; K.R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300-800* (Leicester, 1994), p. 153; H.P.R. Finberg, ‘Mercians and Welsh’, in *idem.*, *Lucerna: Studies of Some Problems in the Early History of England* (London, 1964), p. 71; *idem.*, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands* (Leicester, 1972), pp. 217-24; Hart, ‘The kingdom of Mercia’, p. 48; M. Swanton, (ed. & trans.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (New Edition; London, 2000), p. 273; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 107.

no contemporary seventh- or eighth-century evidence for a people so-named.⁶⁹ They are not listed in the *Tribal Hidage*, and Bede does not mention them: this suggests that the name was not in general use in the pre-Viking period.⁷⁰ Several authors have, with too little basis, accepted that the people referred to as the *Westerne* in the *Tribal Hidage* and assessed at 7,000 hides were in fact the *Magonsætan*.⁷¹ However, if there is any order to be found in the *Tribal Hidage*, the *Westerne* should be located *north* of the *Wreocensætan*, perhaps in Cheshire.⁷² The earliest surviving occurrence of the name is in a charter of 811, in which land at Yarkhill (Herefords.), about ten kilometres east of Hereford, is referred to as being ‘*on Magonsetum*’.⁷³ There are further instances of the name, including in a lost charter possibly dated to the reign of Beornwulf of Mercia (c.823-826), in which a ‘*praefectus et comes regis in Magansetum*’ called Nothheard gave land at Archenfield to St Peter’s in Gloucester;⁷⁴ and in a charter of 958, in which a grant of land by King Edgar at Staunton-on-Arrow (Herefords.), approximately fifteen kilometres west of Leominster, was said to be ‘*in pago Magesætna*’.⁷⁵ These references suggest that the *Magonsætan* were located in the Lugg valley in Herefordshire, with their territory possibly extending from the Wye to the Severn.⁷⁶

Though the *Magonsætan* are not mentioned by name until the ninth century, there is reason to think that some political or ecclesiastical entity was in existence in the region at an earlier date. In his summary of the state of Britain in 731, Bede includes in his list of English bishops Walchstod, described as ‘bishop of the people who dwell west of the

⁶⁹ Pretty, ‘Defining the Magonsæte’, p. 171; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 39-40.

⁷⁰ That is unless, as suggested by Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 18, the *Magonsætan* were either included in the 30,000 hide figure for Mercia, or omitted due to haplography.

⁷¹ For example, Bassett, ‘Church and diocese in the West Midlands’, pp. 13-14; *idem.*, ‘How the west was won’, p. 116; Featherstone, ‘The Tribal Hidage and the ealdormen of Mercia’, p. 31; Hart, ‘The kingdom of Mercia’, p. 45; Keynes, ‘Mercia’, p. 306; Pretty, ‘Defining the Magonsæte’, p. 181; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 106.

⁷² The opening section of *Tribal Hidage* appears to follow a roughly clockwise progression around Mercia, which is listed first. The *Westerne* appear third in the list between the *Wreocensætan* (in Shropshire) and the *Pescaetan* (in the Peak District), hence the suggestion of Cheshire. On this point, see Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 83-5; Higham, *An English Empire*, pp. 84-5; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 18. Cheshire was in fact Stenton’s, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 296, preferred location for the *Westerne*. The possibility that the *Westerne* are to be identified with Gwynedd in north Wales, is canvassed in the next chapter (*infra.*, p. 393).

⁷³ S1264/BCS332.

⁷⁴ S1782. See Finberg, *Early Charters of the West Midlands*, pp. 140-1; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 51.

⁷⁵ S677/BCS1040. There is also a single reference in the ASC s.a. 1016, to the ‘*Magesætana*’.

⁷⁶ J. Hillaby, ‘The early church in Herefordshire: Columban and Roman’, in A. Malpas, J. Butler, A. Davis, S. Davis, T. Malpas & C. Sansom (eds.), *The Early Church in Herefordshire: Proceedings of a Conference held in Leominster in June 2000* (Leominster, 2001), p. 41; Pretty, ‘Defining the Magonsæte’, p. 182.

river Severn [*eis populis qui ultra ammem Sabrinam ad occidentem habitant Ualchstod episcopus*].⁷⁷ This was almost certainly a reference to the bishopric which was eventually located at Hereford and perhaps established as early as c.680.⁷⁸ Sims-Williams has argued that Walchstod's diocese should correspond to a secular kingdom.⁷⁹ However, given that bishoprics were established by Bede's time at places such as Whithorn and Hexham, which did not coincide with any discrete kingdom, this point should probably not be pressed too far. It is quite possible, as Sims-Williams also states, that the people referred to were a 'Mercian overspill' under an additional bishop that eventually attracted the label *Magonsætan*. Interpreted as 'dwellers around Maund' (OE *Magana*),⁸⁰ which continues in a group of Herefordshire place-names east of the Lugg such as Maund Bryan and Rosemaund, the name is etymologically problematic.⁸¹ However, there is no evidence that it was an ancient folk-name rather than one coined in the seventh or eighth century.⁸²

There is also no certainty that Merewalh, an ostensibly seventh-century person who is often regarded as the first known king of the *Magonsætan*,⁸³ was ever associated with a district so-named. Accounts of Merewalh are principally contained in the late eleventh-century *Life of St Mildburg*, abbess of Much Wenlock (Salop) who was said to have been his daughter (d.715), and in the collection of early Wenlock charters – known as

⁷⁷ HE V.23. Walchstod, whose name means 'interpreter' is discussed further below (*infra.*, pp. 419-21).

⁷⁸ J. Blair, 'Hereford', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 234; Hillaby, 'The early church in Herefordshire', pp. 51-4; Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 182; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 90-1. The see may originally have been located elsewhere at *Lidebiri*, either Ledbury (Herefords.) or Lydbury North (Salop). The first surviving reference to a bishop at Hereford is not until 803. See K. Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', in Malpas et al, *The Early Church in Herefordshire*, p. 128.

⁷⁹ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 40.

⁸⁰ Maund appears as *Magana* in some ostensibly early charters, for example, S1798 of c.690, contained in 'St Mildburg's Testament'. See Finberg, *Early Charters of the West Midlands*, pp. 197-216. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, pp. 102-3, lists variant spellings, including *Magene* (1086), *Magen* (1161), *Mawene* (1240), *Maune* (1337).

⁸¹ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 82; *idem.*, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', *ASSAH* 6 (1993), p. 53.

⁸² Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 82; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 40. A link between Maund, or *Magonsætan*, and the Romano-British town of *Magnis* (Kenchester, Herefords.) is considered to be unlikely on phonological grounds. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 102, had suggested a link to Modern Welsh *maen* 'stone, rocks', though she appears to have abandoned this in favour of OE *maga* 'stomach'. Any equation between the *Magonsætan* and the name (Western) *Hecani*, glossed in post-conquest texts such as in the 'Appendix' to Florence of Worcester, has also been dispensed with. See Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', pp. 181-2; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 40-3.

⁸³ For example, Finberg, *Early Charters of the West Midlands*, p. 217; Hillaby, 'The early church in Herefordshire', p. 41; D. Jenkins, 'gwalch: Welsh', *CMCS* 19 (1990), p. 63; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 107.

'St Mildburg's Testament' – appended to the thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Life*.⁸⁴ The earliest surviving references to Merewalh are in the tenth century where he is styled as '*rex Merciorum*' or as a son of Penda, king of the Mercians.⁸⁵ The association between Merewalh and the *Magonsætan* may rest on nothing more than alliterative association and the possibility that his family granted estates in the area, as affirmed in 'St Mildburg's Testament'.⁸⁶ That said, there is some support for the contention that Merewalh was one of Penda's sons who was created ruler of some western sub-kingdom, as Peada was, for example, of the Middle Angles.⁸⁷ It therefore remains possible that in Merewalh's kingdom there is to be found the genesis of the *Magonsætan*, if not the actual toponym. The last apparent member of Merewalh's dynasty holding any authority, Milfrith, appears to have died by 740.⁸⁸

The boundaries and relative size of these western territories which came under Mercian hegemony doubtless remained in a state of flux for much if not all of the pre-Viking period. Indeed, it should not be assumed that there was a regularised or fixed western border, Offa's Dyke notwithstanding.⁸⁹ The possibility should also be allowed of other Anglo-Saxon peoples in the West Midlands who have been lost to history, subsumed within the polities for which some record survives.

⁸⁴ *British Library Additional MS. 34,633*. The *Life of St Mildburg* is attributed to Goscelin. For 'St Mildburg's Testament', see Finberg, *Early Charters of the West Midlands*, pp. 197-216, where it is printed, and for discussion on Mildburg, see R.C. Love, 'Mildburg, St', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 313; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 47-50.

⁸⁵ In the *Liber Vitae* of Hyde Abbey, written c.1031 but originating before 974, Merewalh is called a son of king Penda. In the late tenth-century account of the Kentish royal legends, attributable to Byrhtferth of Ramsey, he is styled *rex Merciorum*. For these references, see Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 81; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 42.

⁸⁶ Finberg, 'Mercians and Welsh', p. 71; Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', pp. 181-2; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 47.

⁸⁷ *HE* III.21. This link is considered plausible by Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 81-2; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 93; Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 181, and Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 47-9. *Contra*. Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 116, who argues against the notion of Penda creating buffer states to protect the Mercian heartland from Britons or West Saxons.

⁸⁸ Milfrith must have died by 740 as he is included in the epitaph composed by bishop Cuthbert (736-40), where he is styled *regulus*. See Hillaby, 'The early church in Herefordshire', pp. 52-4; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 50-1. Merewalh, whose name may be translated as 'famous Briton', will be discussed in more detail below (*infra*, pp. 419-20).

⁸⁹ *Infra*, pp. 408-13.

Britons of Wales

Mercia and the Anglo-Saxon West Midlands bordered the Britons of Wales. The region that came to be known as Wales,⁹⁰ represented the greatest concentration of territory in the southern half of Britain under native British rule once the east was lost to the Anglo-Saxons during the sub-Roman period. Defining the origins and nature of British rule in Wales is, however, problematic. The sources for the history of pre-Viking Wales are few and, apart from Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae*,⁹¹ date from no earlier than the end of the eighth century.⁹² Anglo-Saxon sources provide little additional information which can help define the Britons of Wales.⁹³

The territory of Wales and the West Midlands fell within the late Roman British province of *Britannia Prima*, probably administered from the provincial capital of Cirencester (*Corinium Dobunnorum*), which was also the *civitas* capital of the Dobunni.⁹⁴ The west of Britain, like the north, did not witness the same level of Romanisation as the south and east; indeed, much of the region appears to have been remote from the established Roman *civitas* structure.⁹⁵ The south of Wales was integrated into the civil province in the second century, with *civitates* based at Caerwent (*Venta Silurum*) and Carmarthen (*Moridunum*) administering the Silures and Demetae respectively.⁹⁶ However, few villas are known from Silurian territory in the south-east, and fewer still farther west amongst the Demetae. The West Midlands to the east of

⁹⁰ The term 'Wales' is anachronistic for the period under investigation. As discussed earlier, it derives from OE *wealas* (*supra.*, p. 67). See also K.L. Maund, *The Welsh Kings* (Stroud, 2000), p. 15.

⁹¹ The *DEB* is generally dated to c.540. See D.N. Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating', in M. Lapidge and D. Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge, 1984), p. 51; K.H. Jackson, 'Varia: II. Gildas and the names of the British princes', *CMCS* 3 (1982), p. 32.

⁹² W. Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), p. 198; D.N. Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain: history and legend', *History New Series* 62 (1977), pp. 174-9; Maund, *Welsh Kings*, p. 11; P. Sims-Williams, 'The uses of writing in early medieval Wales', in H. Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 18. Possible exceptions include the *Life of St Samson* (*supra.*, p. 50), and the 'Class I' inscribed stones (*infra.*, pp. 431-2). D.N. Dumville, 'The historical value of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Arthurian Literature* 6 (1986), pp. 9-10, has remarked on the virtual literary collapse in the British west after Gildas. See Sims-Williams, 'The uses of writing in early medieval Wales', pp. 15-18, for an alternative view of literacy in early medieval Wales.

⁹³ N.K. Chadwick's comment, 'The conversion of Northumbria: a comparison of sources', in *idem.* (ed.), *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 157, that we almost know more about the 'little courts and kingdoms' of British Scotland in the sixth and seventh centuries than we do of Wales may be an overstatement; however, her sentiment is certainly justified.

⁹⁴ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 9; S. Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain* (London, 1989), p. 47; N.J. Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester, 1994), p. 112; C. Thomas, *Celtic Britain* (London, 1986), p. 25.

⁹⁵ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 87.

⁹⁶ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 80; Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 86-7; N. Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', in J. Blair & C. Pyrah (eds.), *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future* (London, 1996), p. 49; N.J. Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1992), p. 36; Maund, *Welsh Kings*, p. 15.

Wales fell within the *civitas* of the Cornovii, based at Wroxeter (*Viroconium Cornoviorum*).⁹⁷ Chester (*Deva*) may also have been within their territory, perhaps at the northern limit. The rest of Wales to the west of Wroxeter and beyond the *civitates* of the south – territory of the Ordovices and Deceangli – may have been divided into rural districts (*pagi*). But it is just as likely to have been a military zone.⁹⁸ Most of the forts in Wales had ceased to be places of military occupation during the second century, but a presence continued at Caernarfon (*Segontium*) and Chester, and sites on Anglesey may have been fortified as protection against Irish raiders.⁹⁹ Much of Wales thus remained non-Romanised, and non-urban; there is little to differentiate Roman period settlements from those of the Iron Age.¹⁰⁰

With the collapse in Roman control and civil administration in the early fifth century, the resumption of an earlier form of ‘native governance’ in Wales is quite plausible, especially for much of the region which was never far from its Iron Age roots.¹⁰¹ It should not be expected that the native British aristocracy of Wales had the same political experience, or lack of experience, under the Romans as that of the east and south.¹⁰² The occupation of hill-forts in Wales, such as Dinorben (Denbighs.), Dinas Emrys (Gwynedd) and Dinas Powys (near Cardiff),¹⁰³ typical of the sub-Roman period, provides some evidence for power being concentrated under local chieftains, even if no specific hill-fort can be identified as the seat of a sub-Roman chieftain.¹⁰⁴ Though it is now unfashionable to speak in terms of an Anglo-Saxon ‘clean-sweep’ of eastern Britain, Wendy Davies is probably correct in her assertion of some British migration

⁹⁷ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 20.

⁹⁸ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 87; Edwards, ‘Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall’, p. 50.

⁹⁹ C.A. Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons A.D. 400-600* (Pennsylvania, 1998), pp. 174-5. On Anglesey, Aberffraw may have seen a late Roman auxiliary fort, and Caergybi a fleet base. Refortification is also apparent at other sites in Wales in the fourth century, including Forden Gaer in mid-Wales, and Cardiff and Caerwent in the south.

¹⁰⁰ Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons*, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 76; D.N. Dumville, ‘The idea of government in sub-Roman Britain’, in G. Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe’s Barbarians* (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 179.

¹⁰² Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 87-9.

¹⁰³ C.A. Snyder, *Sub-Roman Britain (AD 400-600): A Gazetteer of Sites* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 34-5; *idem.*, *Age of Tyrants*, pp. 189-92. It should be noted that the occupation of hill-forts in Wales does not in all cases represent the re-use of an Iron Age structure. No Iron Age structures have been found, for example, at Dinas Powys.

¹⁰⁴ *Supra.*, p. 48.

into Wales from eastern parts, including defeated leaders who would have attempted to find their place in an evolving political landscape.¹⁰⁵

Whatever the course of events in the fifth century, it can be deduced from the evidence of Gildas that, by the time he was writing, kingdoms had been established in Wales. A patchwork of independent political units emerged in Wales and the West Midlands during the sub-Roman period. Gildas tells of kings (*reges*) emerging after the Roman withdrawal,¹⁰⁶ and his narrative allows the assumption that the ruling houses of some kingdoms had been in existence for at least two generations.¹⁰⁷ The term *rex* also appears on inscribed stones, the earliest of which is a seventh-century memorial stone at Llangadwaladr (Anglesey) commemorating Catamanus '*rex sapienti(s)simus*', identified as Cadfan, the father of Cadwallon of Gwynedd.¹⁰⁸ Other stones commemorate individuals whose names contain the Celtic element *rīx* or *rīgo-*, which may indicate aristocratic status, such as the late fifth-century inscription containing the name Cunorix found at Wroxeter (Salop),¹⁰⁹ and the sixth-century inscription in both ogham and Latin to Voteporix found in the churchyard of Castell Dwyran (near Narberth, Pembroks.).¹¹⁰ The identification and locality of Gildas's kings is difficult, and it is highly probable that their territories fluctuated throughout the period. Nevertheless, several major polities can be reasonably accepted.

The most easily-located of Gildas's Welsh kings is Vortipor, who is referred to as 'tyrant of the Demetae [*Demetarum tyrannus*]'.¹¹¹ It is probable, though not completely certain, that Vortipor was the same person as the Voteporix mentioned above whose

¹⁰⁵ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 90; *idem.*, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 37-8. See also Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 24, 45.

¹⁰⁶ *DEB* 21.4. For Gildas, these kings 'were anointed not in God's name, but as being crueller than the rest', a *motif* which suggests that only the most powerful succeeded. On Gildas's descriptions of rulers, see Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, pp. 10-11; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, pp. 83-6.

¹⁰⁷ For example, Vortipor of the Demetae, himself growing old, was labelled 'bad son of a good king' (*DEB* 31.1), and Maglocunus had removed the previous king his uncle (*DEB* 33.4); *supra.*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁸ Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 87. The full inscription reads 'CATAMANUS / REX SAPIENTIS (S) I/MUS OPINATIS (S) IM/US OMNIUM REG/UM', 'King Catamanus, wisest [and] most renowned of all kings [lies here]' (*ECMW*, no. 13).

¹⁰⁹ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 25. The inscription reads 'CUNORIX / MACUS MA / QUI COLINE', possibly translated as 'Cunorix (Hound King?), son of Maqui Coline (Son-of-the-Holly?)'. The 'mac' element in the inscription suggests that Cunorix was an Irishman. See Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 325 n. 138, and especially R.P. Wright & K.H. Jackson, 'A late inscription from Wroxeter', *The Antiquaries Journal* 48, part 2 (1968), pp. 296-300.

¹¹⁰ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts 400-1000', in M.J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London, 1995), p. 715; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 118. The ogham reads 'VOTECORIGAS', and the Latin 'MEMORIA / VOTEPORIGIS / PROTICTORIS', 'The memorial of Voteporix the Protector' (*ECMW*, no. 138).

¹¹¹ *DEB* 31.1. Vortipor, who was said to sit a throne (*throno*), was the 'bad son of a good king [*boni regis nequam filii*]'.

memorial stone was found at Castell Dwyran.¹¹² The Demetae were the Romano-British *civitas* of south-west Wales. Gildas preserved the name, which later evolved into the medieval and modern 'Dyfed'.¹¹³ Genealogical evidence suggests an Irish origin for the ruling dynasty of Dyfed and the premise of Irish settlement is supported by the concentration of ogham inscriptions and Irish place-names in south-west and mid-Wales.¹¹⁴ The 'country of Demetia [*regio Demetiae*]' is also recorded in the *Life of St Samson*, and the saint's father was said to have been of 'Demetian stock [*Demetiano ex genere*]'.¹¹⁵ Further references to Demetia/Dyfed demonstrate its continued existence as an early medieval kingdom.¹¹⁶

Of the remainder of Gildas's kings, whom he does not locate, the most readily identified is Maglocunus, 'dragon of the island [*insularis draco*]'.¹¹⁷ Maglocunus has long been recognised as Maelgwn, 'rex Guenedotae' (later Gwynedd),¹¹⁸ the kingdom of north-west Wales and Anglesey, certainly the island to which Gildas referred.¹¹⁹ This overlapped with the region of the Ordovices during the Roman period. However, this name appears to have been supplanted,¹²⁰ perhaps due to the emergence of Maelgwn's dynasty.¹²¹ Corroborative evidence of the name of Maelgwn's kingdom derives from a sixth-century inscription found at Penmachno (Conwy), which remembers one

¹¹² For example, Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 80; Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 92-3; Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating', p. 57; Jackson, 'Varia: II. Gildas and the names of the British princes', p. 32; Maund, *Welsh Kings*, p. 20; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 118.

¹¹³ W. Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm: Studies in the Llandaff Charters* (London, 1978), p. 89; Thomas, *Celtic Britain*, p. 50.

¹¹⁴ Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts', p. 704; Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 88; Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating', p. 57. Dumville notes that there is agreement between the Harleian genealogy for Dyfed (*EWGT*, pp. 9-10, § 2) and genealogical information contained in the Irish text *Indarba na nDéissi*.

¹¹⁵ *VS* I.1.

¹¹⁶ For example, *AC* s.a. 797, 'Maredudd, king of the Demetians [*Morgetiud rex Demetorum*]'; *HB* 47, 'country of the Demetians [*regione Demetorum*]'; *ASC* s.a. 914, '[Vikings] went ... to Dyfed [*Deomed*]'.
¹¹⁷ *DEB* 33.1.

¹¹⁸ *AC* s.a. 547. Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating', pp. 51-7 & esp. p. 54, cautions against relying on the *AC* to date Maelgwn.

¹¹⁹ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 77-8; Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 92; Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating', p. 52; Higham, *The English Conquest*, p. 110; Jackson, 'Varia: II. Gildas and the names of the British princes', pp. 34-5.

¹²⁰ There is evidence of the name Ordovices further south in Cerdigion, found on a (fifth-century?) inscribed stone at Penbryn, 'CORBALENGI IACIT / ORDOVS', '[The stone] of Corbalengus. [Here] he lies, an Ordovician' (*ECMW*, no. 126).

¹²¹ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 77-8, provides the suggestion that the Venedotae may have been a rival dynasty from Anglesey or the shores of Menai Strait who overcame the Ordovices. Perhaps the uncle Maelgwn was said by Gildas to have killed was an Ordovician king, and Maelgwn's triumph marked the end of his line. Thomas, *Celtic Britain*, p. 50, has linked the name Venedotia to British *weneda*, interpreted as 'desirable land'. Venedotae is a variation of *Guenedotae*.

Cantiorix ‘*Venedotis cives*’, ‘a Venedotian citizen’.¹²² The *Historia Brittonum* recounts that Maelgwn’s ancestor Cunedda came with his sons from the region of Gododdin in the north,¹²³ but the historicity of this claim has been increasingly questioned.¹²⁴ Gwynedd was the kingdom of Bede’s barbarous British leader Cadwallon, though he only ever referred to him as *rex Brettonum*.¹²⁵ Cadwallon’s father Catamanus/Cadfan was memorialised on the seventh-century stone at Llangadwaladr (Anglesey) as a wise and powerful king.¹²⁶ Maelgwn, Cadfan and Cadwallon all appear in the genealogy for Gwynedd contained in the Harleian Collection of c.1100.¹²⁷ Judging from the written evidence, Gwynedd remained the pre-eminent kingdom of Wales for much of the early middle ages.¹²⁸

A case has also been made for locating Gildas’s Cuneglasus in north Wales. Gildas called Cuneglasus ‘driver of the chariot of the Bear’s Stronghold [*receptaculi ursi*]’, and it has been argued that this is the place-name Dineirth, near Llandrillo-yn-Rhos (Conwy).¹²⁹ If Cuneglasus is correctly identified by the Welsh name Cynlas, he is listed as first cousin to Maelgwn in the Harleian genealogy for Gwynedd, and in a later pedigree-text as a dynast of Rhos in eastern Gwynedd.¹³⁰ Thus, he may have been a ruler of Rhos, though this identification is not secure, and the place-name Dineirth can be found at other locations in Wales.¹³¹

¹²² Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 79. The full inscription reads ‘CANTIORI(X) HIC IACET / [V]ENEDOTIS CIVE (S) FVIT / [C]ONSOBRINO (S) // MA[G]LI / MAGISTRAT’, ‘Cantiorix lies here. He was a Venedotian citizen [and] cousin of Maglos the Magistrate’ (*ECMW*, no. 103). Some level of Romanitas is implied by the title magistrate. Cantiorix is a further example of a name containing the Celtic element *rīx*.

¹²³ *HB* 62.

¹²⁴ See note 92 (*supra*., p. 155).

¹²⁵ *HE* II.20. Cadwallon is styled ‘king of the country of Gwynedd [*rex Guenedotae regionis*]’ in *HB* 61.

¹²⁶ *Supra*., p. 383.

¹²⁷ *EWGT*, p. 9, § 1. See also Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 93; Dumville, ‘Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating’, p. 55.

¹²⁸ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 74; J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), p. 63; Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 104; D. Ó Corráin, ‘Ireland, Scotland and Wales, c.700 to the early eleventh century’, in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Volume II c.700-900* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 59. For Gildas, Maglocunus/Maelgwn was ‘mightier than many both in power and malice’ (*DEB* 33.1), ‘higher than almost all the general of Britain, in your kingdom as in your physique’ (*DEB* 33.2). In the *HB* 62, Maelgwn was styled ‘*magnus rex*’. Other references to Gwynedd include *AC* s.a. 798, ‘Caradog, king of Gwynedd [*Caratauc rex Guenedotae*]’; *AC* s.a. 809, ‘region of Gwynedd [*Guenedotae regione*]’, and numerous mentions in the *HB*: 40, 61, 62, 64, 65.

¹²⁹ For example, Jackson, ‘Varia: II. Gildas and the names of the British princes’, pp. 33–4; M. Winterbottom, *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and other Works* (Chichester, 1978), p. 152.

¹³⁰ *EWGT*, pp. 9–10, §§ 1, 3. See also Dumville, ‘Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating’, pp. 57–8.

¹³¹ For example, there was a Dineirth in Ceredigion. See J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (London, 1939), vol. II, p. 472; Maund, *Welsh Kings*, p. 22; C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (Berkeley, 1981), p. 251; *idem.*, *Celtic Britain*, p. 116. Without providing any reasoning, Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 78–9, associates Cuneglasus with Powys.

The last of Gildas's kings, Aurelius Caninus,¹³² has been tenuously linked with the kingdom of Powys in east-central and north-eastern Wales and perhaps the northern West Midlands. Kenneth Jackson argued that the second word in the name – Latin for 'dog-like' – may have been a pun by Gildas on the British *Cunignos*, Middle Welsh *Cynin*,¹³³ which is found in one of the two royal lineages for Powys in the Harleian Collection.¹³⁴ This Cynin, who appears as father of Selyf, said in the *Annales Cambriae* to have been killed at the battle of Chester c.613-616,¹³⁵ is listed in the lineage a generation or two later than Gildas's conventional *floruit*. However, Dumville argues that the seventh-century record of the dynasty is defective to the extent that up to four generations may have been shortened.¹³⁶ If so, *Cynin* of the Powysian genealogy may be identified with Aurelius Caninus.¹³⁷

Powys is the most enigmatic of the principal early British kingdoms of Wales. The name is not recorded until the ninth century,¹³⁸ and the earlier presence of the kingdom is supposed on the basis of the genealogy alluded to above, on Welsh saga poetry, and on the pedigrees of Cyngen/Concenn (d.854), a later king of Powys, inscribed on the Pillar of Elise in the Vale of Llangollen (Denbighs.).¹³⁹ It has been argued that the kingdom of Powys emerged out of the *civitas* of the Cornovii,¹⁴⁰ and that Aurelius Caninus should be associated with Wroxeter.¹⁴¹ But there is nothing which can support any link between the former *civitas* and the later kingdom, even if the territories were coterminous.¹⁴² The name Powys has been thought to derive from Latin *pagenses*

¹³² *DEB* 30.1-3.

¹³³ Jackson, 'Varia: II. Gildas and the names of the British princes', p. 31.

¹³⁴ Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating', pp. 55-7.

¹³⁵ *AC* s.a. 613. The name Cynin is rendered as Cynan/Cinan in the *AC* and the Harleian genealogy (*EWGT*, p. 12, § 22).

¹³⁶ Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating', p. 57.

¹³⁷ The appearance of a similar name – CVNIGNI – on a late fifth-century inscription found at Eglwys Gymyn, Carmarthenshire (*ECMW*, no. 142), should, however, underscore the need for caution in this identification. See Higham, *The English Conquest*, p. 177; Jackson, 'Varia: II. Gildas and the names of the British princes', p. 31.

¹³⁸ *AC* s.a. 808, 'Cadell [king] of Powys [*Catell Pouis*]'.

¹³⁹ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 94, 99-100; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 28; J. Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the Englynion* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 125. As recorded on the Pillar, the later dynasty traced its descent from Vortigern, represented as the son-in-law of Magnus Maximus. See D. Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', *The Antiquaries Journal* 80 (2000), pp. 202-3, for the text of the Pillar as transcribed by Edward Lhuyd in 1696.

¹⁴⁰ Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', p. 92; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 78.

¹⁴¹ Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, p. 252. Wroxeter did see significant occupation until the (possibly mid-) sixth century, but was subsequently abandoned. Its suitability as the location for a sub-Roman chieftain or king has been questioned; see Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 22-4; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 25; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, pp. 157-61.

¹⁴² Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 27-8, notes that there is, for example, no name-link as for Dyfed and the Demetae, or Gwent and *Venta Silurum*.

'people of a rural district / people of the country',¹⁴³ which suggests some Romano-British continuity.¹⁴⁴ Though the kingdom of Powys remains ill-defined, there is enough evidence for the existence of some polity in central Wales during the pre-Viking period, which may have extended into the West Midlands from Chester to the northern reaches of the Wye.¹⁴⁵

Beyond the evidence of Gildas, there appear to have been other regional identities in pre-Viking Wales. The most certain of these is Gwent in south-east Wales near the Wye, mentioned in the *Life of St Samson*. Rendered as *Dementia*, i.e. *de Venta*, it is described as 'the next province to Demetia [*provincia proxima eiusdem Demetiae*]', and the homeland of the saint's mother.¹⁴⁶ The name Gwent is derived from the first word of the Roman town name *Venta Silurum* (Caerwent), and some continuity of the regional identity of the Silures is implied.¹⁴⁷ Caerwent itself shows evidence of sub-Roman and early medieval occupation.¹⁴⁸ Apart from the *Llandaff Charters*,¹⁴⁹ the evidence of which has been increasingly questioned,¹⁵⁰ no king is recorded for Gwent until the ninth century.¹⁵¹ Its status as an early kingdom is thus uncertain; however, such an identification would not be unreasonable. Other early polities have also been suggested, such as: Ergyng (Archenfield) west of the Wye to the north of Gwent;¹⁵²

¹⁴³ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 79; Maund, *Welsh Kings*, p. 32; Thomas, *Celtic Britain*, p. 116.

¹⁴⁴ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁵ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 94; Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', p. 203. Welsh poetry about figures associated with Powys, such as Cynddylan, implies the existence of a confederation of sub-kingdoms that may have gone to make up Powys; some of these may have stretched into the West Midlands, especially Shropshire, perhaps as far east as the River Tern. See Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 125, 139.

¹⁴⁶ *VS* I.1.

¹⁴⁷ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 84; Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, p. 90; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 46.

¹⁴⁸ Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, pp. 153-4.

¹⁴⁹ Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*; *idem.*, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth, 1979).

¹⁵⁰ See Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 140-8; J.R. Davies, 'Liber Landavensis: its date and the identity of its editor', *CMCS* 35 (1998), pp. 1-11; K.L. Maund, 'Fact and narrative fiction in the Llandaff Charters', *SC* 31 (1997), pp. 173-93; P. Sims-Williams, 'Review of W. Davies, "The Llandaff Charters"', *JEH* 33 (1982), pp. 124-9; P.N. Wood, 'On the little British kingdom of Craven', *NH* 32 (1996), pp. 15-16. Even Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, p. 91, states that there are only two pre-tenth-century references to kings of Gwent in the *Llandaff Charters* and that both of these are suspect and likely to be the product of late editing.

¹⁵¹ *AC* s.a. 848, 'Ithael king of Gwent [*Iudhael rex Guent*]'; *AC* s.a. 895, 'Northmen ... laid waste ... Gwent [*Guent*]'; Asser, ch. 80, 'Brochfael and Ffyrnfael, sons of Meurig and kings of Gwent [*reges Guent*]'; *ASC* MS. D s.a. 926, 'Owain, king of Gwent [*Guent*]'.
¹⁵² The name Ergyng derives from the Roman town *Ariconium* (Weston-under-Penyard, Herefords.). As this is to the east of the Wye and the later region of Archenfield, some historians have suggested that the centre of British Ergyng had retreated westward under Anglo-Saxon pressure (e.g. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 45). However, the ostensibly early existence of a British kingdom of Ergyng is typically sourced from Davies' reconstruction which was based on the *Llandaff Charters* (see note 150 above). The earliest other reference to Ergyng ('*regione quae vocatur Ercing*') is in the *HB* 73.

Brycheiniog (Brecknockshire) in the Brecon region;¹⁵³ Ceredigion in west-central Wales,¹⁵⁴ and Glywysing as a possible western neighbour to Gwent.¹⁵⁵ There is insufficient evidence, however, to determine the status of these polities during the pre-Viking period.¹⁵⁶

Summary

The pre-Viking period witnessed the emergence of several independent or semi-independent British kingdoms in Wales. There is evidence that the Britons of Wales recognised a shared language, *Cymraeg*,¹⁵⁷ and eventually developed the sense of nationality inherent in the word *Cymry*, ‘people of the same district [*bro*]’, or ‘Britons’.¹⁵⁸ Gildas also implies that there persisted some sense of a shared Roman past in his use of the term *cives* ‘citizens’ for the Britons, as well as a sense of a shared Christianity.¹⁵⁹ The people of Wales are uniformly known as either *Britanni*/*Brittones*

¹⁵³ AC s.a. 848, ‘Ithael king of Gwent was killed by the men of Brycheiniog [*a viris Brocenniauc occisus est*]’; Asser, ch. 80, ‘Elise ap Tewdwr, king of Brycheiniog [*rex Brecheniauc*]’. There is a concentration of ogham-inscribed stones in the region of Brycheiniog, the earliest of which appear to date from the sixth century, that might suggest some link with Dyfed. For what it is worth, Brychan is also an Irish name. See Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, pp. 81-2, 117-18; Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 88; Wood, ‘On the little British kingdom of Craven’, p. 15.

¹⁵⁴ AC s.a. 807, ‘Arthen king of Ceredigion [*Arthgen rex Cereticiaun*]’; AC s.a. 871, ‘Gwgon, king of Ceredigion [*Guoccaun rex Cereticiaun*]’; HB 74, ‘the country called Ceredigion [*regione quae vocatur Cereticiaun*]’.

¹⁵⁵ AC s.a. 864, ‘Duda laid Glywysing [*Gliuisigng*] waste’; HB 41, ‘the country called Glywysing [*regione quae vocatur Gleguissing*]’; Asser, ch. 80, ‘Hywel ap Rhys, king of Glywysing [*rex Gleguissing*]’. It is possible that Gwent was subsumed into Glywysing at some point, but, given the evidence of Asser, who lists kings for both regions, it appears that they were separate entities in the ninth century.

¹⁵⁶ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 94; Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 37.

¹⁵⁷ The Irish ‘Cormac’s Glossary’ of c.900 represents the earliest surviving use of the term, rendered *Combrec* (*Sanas Chormaic*, no. 206). Cormac also makes use of the term *Bretnas*, for the language of the Britons (*Sanas Chormaic*, no. 883). For these references, see Charles-Edwards, ‘Language and society among the Insular Celts’, p. 710, who also argues that the term *Cymraeg* was borrowed into Irish no later than the early seventh century. The earliest attestation of *Cymraeg* in Welsh literature is post-Conquest.

¹⁵⁸ The putatively earliest surviving reference to *Cymry* is in the *Moliant Cadwallon*, a praise poem to Cadwallon of Gwynedd which survives only in a seventeenth-century witness, transcribed by the antiquary Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt (*British Library Add. MS. 14907*). I would like to thank Alex Woolf (pers. comm., 4 March 2003) for drawing this material to my attention. The text and a translation of the poem has recently been provided by A. Breeze, ‘Seventh century Northumbria and a poem to Cadwallon’, *NH* 38 (2001), pp. 145-52. The term *Cymry* was also used in the tenth-century *Armes Prydein Vawr*; see the edition by I. Williams & R. Bromwich, (eds. & trans.), *Armes Prydein: The Prophecy of Britain; from The Book of Taliesin* (Dublin, 1972), pp. 20-1. Charles-Edwards, ‘Language and society among the Insular Celts’, pp. 710-15, discusses the process by which the term *Cymry* – from *Cymro*, i.e. *Cym-bro*, in origin ‘people of the same district’ – came to refer to the Britons in a wider sense.

¹⁵⁹ DEB 26.1. The translator, Michael Winterbottom, renders *cives* as ‘countrymen’. *Cives* appears to be used in a similar manner in HB 63. See C. Stancliffe, ‘The British church and the mission of Augustine’, in R. Gameson (ed.), *St Augustine and the Conversion of England* (Stroud, 1999), p. 139, regarding a shared view of Christianity in Wales.

or *wealas* in the Anglo-Saxon sources.¹⁶⁰ However, early in the pre-Viking period, regional loyalties appear to have been strong, as indicated by the regional labels on certain inscribed stones,¹⁶¹ and by the civil wars which were so deplored by Gildas.¹⁶² Thus, the Britons of Wales would not have interacted with the Anglo-Saxons as a unified whole.¹⁶³ And given the evidence for several Anglo-Saxon sub-kingdoms in the West Midlands, nor should it be expected that the Anglo-Saxons did the same. There was, therefore, the potential for a complex array of inter-relations between the Britons of Wales and the Mercians and other Angles of the West Midlands.

¹⁶⁰ For example, Cadwallon 'rex Brettonum' (HE II.20); ASC s.a. 743, 'Æthelbald, king of Mercia, and Cuthred, king of Wessex, fought against the *Welsh* [*Wealas*]' (emphasis added).

¹⁶¹ For example, the Cantiorix '*Venedotis cives*' inscription mentioned earlier (*supra.*, pp. 384-5), and the Aliortus '*Elmetiaco*' inscription described in Chapter 6 (see note 79, *supra.*, p. 153). Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 110, and Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 70, provide other examples of inscriptions which include a regional identification.

¹⁶² For example, DEB 26.2, 27.1, 30.1.

¹⁶³ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 76; Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 88; Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', p. 205; Maund, *Welsh Kings*, p. 11.

Chapter 11

Warfare, Conquest and Territorial Expansion

It has been shown that during the pre-Viking period it was the Britons who faced the brunt of Anglo-Saxon expansion. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recounted a tale of continuous warfare between the West Saxons and the southern Britons, and Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* depicts the period as one of Anglo-British hostility, in attitudes as well as deeds. Gildas too wrote of past wars between the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons, counselled against laziness and encouraged the memory of the 'storm [*tempestas*]' of earlier days.¹ These accounts suggest a society in pre-Viking Britain characterised by violence.² Although it is not known where Gildas lived, his denunciation of British kings ruling in Wales leads to the presumption that these were Britons who had seen warfare with the Anglo-Saxons, implying a bellicose climate on the border between the Mercians and the Britons of Wales.

That the Mercians were identified and named as 'dwellers on the march', as pioneers on the border with the Britons, does suggest that they faced the Britons across a frontier or a march of disputed territory: a zone with mixed and overlapping settlement and political structures. Yet the formation of this frontier is a matter of deep debate: was it was the result of a violent incursion by the Mercians, of a treaty arrangement between the relevant parties, or of a strategy of voluntary secession by the British? In his *A History of Wales*, Sir John Edward Lloyd commented that 'little is known of the process by which the boundary between the English and the Welsh was evolved',³ and this comment still holds true. Early Mercian historical records are scant, and those for Wales no better.⁴ Consequently, opinion on the nature of Mercian and British frontier relations is diverse and ranges from arguments for the peaceful 'evolution' of the border and the intermingling of Britons and Anglo-Saxons,⁵ to assertions that the Mercians and

¹ For example, *DEB* 26.2-4. As stated by D.N. Dumville, 'The idea of government in sub-Roman Britain', in G. Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 197, 212, the Saxones in Gildas's time remained a threat 'hovering in the background'.

² I. Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 90; C.A. Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons A.D. 400-600* (Pennsylvania, 1998), p. 249.

³ J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (London, 1939), vol. I, p. 195.

⁴ *Supra.*, pp. 369, 381.

⁵ For example, S. Bassett, 'How the west was won: the Anglo-Saxon takeover of the west midlands', *ASSAH* 11 (2000), p. 115; H.P.R. Finberg, 'Mercians and Welsh', in *idem.*, *Lucerna: Studies of Some*

West Midland Angles established themselves by force or threat of force.⁶ What does appear to be agreed upon, however, is that the nature of relations between the Britons of Wales and the Mercians and other Angles in the West Midlands changed between the seventh and eighth centuries. This chapter will, therefore, examine military interaction for these centuries, and the key issues of the British alliances of Penda of Mercia in the seventh century and the construction of Offa's Dyke in the eighth.

Military Interaction in the Seventh Century and the British Alliances of Penda of Mercia

It is in the seventh century that relations between the Mercians and Britons of Wales are at their most impenetrable. At the beginning of the century, there is no clear indication of the territory in the West Midlands which was under British as opposed to Mercian, or proto-Mercian, control.⁷ Furthermore, and most significantly, there is no record of the conquest of the West Midlands in the Anglo-Saxon documentary sources. There is some later Welsh evidence, but it mostly centres around laments for the loss of Powys remembered in saga poetry or *englynion*.⁸ Yet, there is no doubt that this was a crucial period for the Britons of Wales and the Mercians as by the end of the century the West Midlands had been absorbed into Mercia, or one of its *subregna*.⁹ How then can frontier relations between the Britons and Mercians in the seventh century be examined and characterised? And what is the role of Penda of Mercia, his British alliances, and his and Cadwallon of Gwynedd's wars with the *imperium*-wielding kings of Northumbria?

Problems in the Early History of England (London, 1964), p. 77; M. Gelling, 'The early history of western Mercia', in Bassett, *Origins*, p. 191; C. Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', in R. Gameson (ed.), *St Augustine and the Conversion of England* (Stroud, 1999), p. 136.

⁶ For example, K.R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300-800* (Leicester, 1994), p. 218; D.P. Kirby, 'Welsh bards and the border', in A. Dornier (ed.), *Mercian Studies* (Leicester, 1977), p. 35; P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 21.

⁷ Gelling, 'The early history of western Mercia', p. 191. The lack of pagan Anglo-Saxon burial evidence west of the Severn, and for the later sixth century, was discussed in Chapter 10 (*supra.*, pp. 371-2).

⁸ N. Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', in Bassett, *Origins*, p. 162; M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), p. 72; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 38. The Welsh saga *englynion* have most recently been edited and analysed by J. Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the Englynion* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁹ S. Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands: the transition from British to Anglo-Saxon control', in J. Blair & R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), p. 16; J.D. Bu'Lock, *Pre-Conquest Cheshire 383-1066* (Chester, 1972), p. 32; Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 92; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 72; K. Nurse, 'New dating for Wat's Dyke', *History Today* 49, no. 8 (1999), p. 4; B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), p. 104.

The first certain record of warfare between the Britons of Wales and an Anglo-Saxon antagonist did not involve Mercia or the West Midland Angles at all, but rather was with the Northumbrian king Æthelfrith at the battle of Chester, c.613-616.¹⁰ This battle seems to have set Æthelfrith against the Britons of Powys.¹¹ Chester and the British monastery at Bangor-is-Coed were most likely within the territory of Powys, or an eastern tributary, and both the *Annales Cambriae* and *Annals of Ulster* entries for the battle mention the death of Selyf son of Cynan, listed as a king of Powys in the Harleian genealogies of c.1100. Æthelfrith's route to Chester need not have taken him through Mercian territory, however extensive that may have been at the time; so there is no imperative for Mercian involvement in the battle.¹² It is likely that the advance by Æthelfrith to Chester was motivated by a desire to extend his northern overlordship, rather than for the acquisition of territory, and Powys as the 'border kingdom' was the most accessible target. The evidence indicates that the battle was a defeat for the British, and Æthelfrith should, therefore, have been able to prosecute any demands he may have had for British tribute or the taking of hostages. It is unknown, however, whether Powys ever rendered tribute to Æthelfrith; and his death in c.616 would have disrupted any such arrangements.

Æthelfrith's rival and successor, Edwin, also appears as an aggressor against the Britons of Wales. Edwin was regarded by Bede as ruler of *all* the Britons, as well as the Angles, and was said to have 'brought under English rule [*Anglorum subiecit imperio*]' the British Mevanian Isles, usually identified as Anglesey and Man.¹³ If Anglesey was subdued, the kingdom of Gwynedd, probably ruled by Cadwallon at the time, must have come under Edwin's overlordship.¹⁴ In this regard, the *Annales Cambriae* entry under

¹⁰ I have largely excluded in this analysis the evidence of the *Llandaff Charters*. W. Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm: Studies in the Llandaff Charters* (London, 1978), p. 93, used the charters to argue for hostility between Britons and Anglo-Saxons along the course of the Wye in south-east Wales, c.600; several charters attest to grants given in Gwent and Ergyng by British rulers in thanks for victories over Anglo-Saxons, e.g. LL 123 & 161 (Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, pp. 167, 170; *idem.*, *The Llandaff Charters*, Aberystwyth, 1979, pp. 95, 103). As stated earlier (*supra.*, p. 387), the *Llandaff Charters* are highly questionable as evidence for events in the seventh, eighth or even ninth centuries.

¹¹ *Supra.*, pp. 170-2.

¹² M. Ziegler, 'The politics of exile in early Northumbria', *The Heroic Age* 2 (1999), <http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/2/ha2open.htm>, p. 8. N.J. Higham, 'King Cearl, the battle of Chester and the origins of the Mercian "overkingship"', *Midland History* 16 (1992), pp. 6-10, suggested that Cearl, the first known king of Mercia, was present at the battle, as overlord of Powys, Gwynedd and the Midlands. But there is no evidence for Cearl's involvement or for his alleged overlordship.

¹³ *HE* II.5, II.9 (*supra.*, pp. 176-8).

¹⁴ It is uncertain when Cadwallon became king of Gwynedd. His father Cadfan's death is not recorded, beyond the memorial stone at Llangadwaladr (*supra.*, p. 383). A date in the 620's seems most likely.

the year 629,¹⁵ recording the besieging of Cadwallon on the island of *Glannauc* (Priestholm/Puffin Island), may reveal a campaign of subjugation by Edwin, even though no antagonist is identified. There is no way of determining whether Edwin, after his defeat of Æthelfrith, assumed any overlordship won by his predecessor at Chester, or whether he had to carve out his own 'empire'.¹⁶ Bede certainly proclaimed that it was Edwin who 'like no other English king before him, held under his sway [*sub dicione acciperet*] the whole realm of Britain, not only English kingdoms but those ruled over by the Britons as well';¹⁷ however, the probable bias arising from Bede's desire to aggrandise Edwin needs to be taken into account. Yet if Edwin had indeed besieged Cadwallon, this might mean that the Britons of Powys did not have full control of territory around Chester such that Edwin could march through to Gwynedd.¹⁸

It has been suggested that the people called the *Westerne* ('Westerners'), who were assessed in the *Tribal Hidage* at 7,000 hides, were of a British kingdom or confederacy under the *imperium* of Edwin.¹⁹ The fact that the *Westerne* are listed third, after the *Wreocensætan* (in Shropshire) and before the *Pecsætan* (in the Peak District), should indicate a location in the north of the West Midlands, or perhaps in north Wales.²⁰ Given their location, the Britons of Gwynedd may have been described as 'Westerners' in Old English, and the fact that Elmet was listed in the *Hidage* does indicate that British kingdoms were not excluded.²¹ However, while this identification conforms with Bede's evidence for Edwin's *imperium* over the Britons, it may equally be the case that the *Westerne* were Angles who settled in lowland Cheshire prior to subjugating the region of the Peak.²²

¹⁵ AC s.a.

¹⁶ N.J. Higham, 'Medieval "overkingship" in Wales: the earliest evidence', *WHR* 16 (1992-93), p. 150; *idem.*, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxon Kings* (Manchester, 1995), p. 80, posits that Edwin took over Æthelfrith's overlordship of British kingdoms. It may be, however, that Edwin did not turn to Wales until after he had removed Ceretic from Elmet in the 620s.

¹⁷ *HE* II.9.

¹⁸ W. Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1990), p. 63.

¹⁹ Higham, 'Medieval "overkingship" in Wales', pp. 151-3; *idem.*, *An English Empire*, pp. 84-5.

²⁰ *Supra.*, p. 377.

²¹ Higham, *An English Empire*, p. 85.

²² Indeed, the assessment of 7,000 hides for the *Westerne* clearly exceeds Bede's (*HE* II.9) figure of 960 for Anglesey (assuming that this is the correct identification for the southern Mevanian Isle). Higham, 'Medieval "overkingship" in Wales', p. 153, used this discrepancy to support his argument that Cadwallon of Gwynedd exercised an overlordship in Wales and that Edwin's tribute assessment therefore drew from this broader confederacy. This is indeed possible; Bede did after all call Cadwallon 'king of the Britons [*rex Brettonum*]' (*HE* II.20, III.1), and this might suggest a wider rulership than just Gwynedd. However, it is probably over-interpretation to insist on such a specific meaning for Bede's label. It may also be unwise to conclude too much from a comparison of *hidage* assessments across sources. A hide was not a fixed land unit and could have varied in its meaning (and Bede did not himself even use the term but rather referred to the land of a household according to the 'English reckoning').

It is in the context of Edwin's likely overlordship of the Britons of Gwynedd that the most significant seventh-century evidence for military interaction between Mercians and Britons needs to be considered, namely, the alliance between Penda and Cadwallon. This is the most celebrated association between a Briton and an Anglo-Saxon in pre-Viking Britain.²³ The principal source for their association is Bede, who states that 'Caedualia (sic), king of the Britons, rebelled [*rebellavit*] against [Edwin] ... supported by Penda, a most energetic man of the royal house of Mercia'.²⁴ In a 'fierce battle' on the twelfth of October 633 at *Haethfelth*, usually identified as Hatfield (South Yorks.),²⁵ Edwin was killed and his entire army destroyed and scattered. One of Edwin's sons, Osfrith, was also killed, and another, Eadfrith, was forced to submit to Penda, who subsequently killed him. Cadwallon and Penda thus were said to have engaged in 'great slaughter both of the church and of the people of Northumbria [*maxima est facta strages in ecclesia vel gente Nordanhymbrorum*]', with Cadwallon singled out by Bede as 'meaning to wipe out the whole English nation from the land of Britain [*totum genus Anglorum Britanniae finibus erarurum se esse deliberans*]',²⁶

The genesis of the alliance between the British Cadwallon and the Mercian Penda is likely to lie in the *imperium* imposed by Edwin over the two rulers' kingdoms. It is probable that Edwin exercised overlordship of Gwynedd, and perhaps other kingdoms in northern Wales. It also appears that Edwin was overlord of Mercia. Bede claimed that Edwin exercised *imperium* over all the peoples of Britain: Britons *and* Angles, with the exception of the people of Kent.²⁷ Thus, both Cadwallon and Penda appear to have

The 7,000 hides for the *Westerne* far exceeded the 600 for Elmet; at the least, this implies that the *Westerne* represented a larger polity than Elmet.

²³ Bu'Lock, *Pre-Conquest Cheshire*, p. 29-32; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 77; D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (London, 1991), p. 86; Lloyd, *History of Wales*, I, p. 185; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 104.

²⁴ HE II.20.

²⁵ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 167; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 83. This battle is located at *Meigen* or *Meicen* in the British sources (see note 26 below). Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 85, Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 127-9, and C. Stancliffe, 'Oswald, "most holy and most victorious king of the Northumbrians"', in C. Stancliffe & E. Cambridge (eds.), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, 1995), p. 47, state that *Meigen* was in fact a district in Powys near Welshpool. If so, it is possible that the battle of *Haethfelth* with Edwin was conflated with an earlier one fought in Powys, perhaps also with Edwin as an antagonist.

²⁶ HE II.20. See also ASC MS. E s.a. 633, 'Here King Edwin was killed by Cadwallon and Penda at Hatfield on 14 October ... and his son Osfrith was also killed with him. And then afterwards Cadwallon and Penda went and did for the whole land of Northumbria'; HB 61, 'Osfrith and Eadfrith were the two sons of Edwin, and they fell with him at the battle of *Meicen*, and the kingdom was never revived from their stock, for none of their line survived that battle, but they were all killed with him by the army of Cadwallon, king of the country of Gwynedd'; AC s.a. 630, 'On the Kalends of January the battle of *Meigen*; and there Edwin was killed with his two sons; but Cadwallon was the victor'. Bede's representation of Cadwallon as the archetypal barbarian was discussed in Chapter 9 (*supra.*, pp. 354-5).

²⁷ HE II.5; II.9.

been tributary to Edwin, and so came together in their alliance against a common enemy. It is inferred from Bede's use of *rebellavit* that Cadwallon, supported by Penda, was attempting to throw off the Northumbrian yoke.²⁸ In this regard, there may have been others involved in the so-called 'rebellion': other West Midland Angles, and perhaps Britons from Powys who remembered the Northumbrians from the battle of Chester.²⁹

Bede gives the impression that Cadwallon was the prime mover in the alliance, and that Penda was a 'junior client'.³⁰ Bede states that Cadwallon was 'supported by Penda [*auxilium praebente illi Penda*]',³¹ and most of Bede's account of the relevant events is concerned with the actions of Cadwallon. Certainly, it needs to be taken into account that Bede's invective was mostly directed at the Christian Cadwallon whom he saw as a traitor to the faith. Yet it may also be significant that Penda is left out of the British accounts of the death of Edwin.³² Perhaps from the British point of view it was Cadwallon who initiated and led the alliance, and so was the one who was accorded the victory. If Cadwallon knew the legend, recorded in the *Historia Brittonum*, that his ancestor Cunedda had come from the north,³³ he could also have been moved by a desire either to support his 'brethren' in Gododdin or to create a northern British empire, liberated from the rule of the Northumbrians.³⁴

In this regard, it is instructive to consider Bede's account of Cadwallon's actions after the battle of *Haethfelth*.³⁵ On Edwin's death, the kingship of Northumbria devolved such that Edwin's cousin Osric, son of Ælfric, ruled in Deira, and Eanfrith, son of Æthelfrith, ruled in Bernicia. Their kingships were short-lived, however, as both fell to Cadwallon in the following year. Osric and his army were defeated and destroyed while

²⁸ This is a common interpretation, for example, C. Cessford, 'Where are the Anglo-Saxons in the Gododdin Poem?', *ASSAH* 8 (1995), p. 96; Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 88; Higham, 'Medieval "overkingship" in Wales', p. 150; R. Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona, Life of St Columba* (Harmondsworth, 1995), p. 251 n. 38. That there should be more of a moral than a literal interpretation of Bede's *rebellavit* has already been raised (*supra*, pp. 354-5).

²⁹ C. Corning, 'The baptism of Edwin, king of Northumbria: a new analysis of the British tradition', *NH* 36 (2000), p. 11; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 86. K.L. Maund, *The Welsh Kings* (Stroud, 2000), p. 32, discusses the possibility that Mercia and Gwynedd also allied against Powys.

³⁰ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 167; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 77; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 86.

³¹ *HE* II.20.

³² For what it is worth, Penda is also left out of the later Welsh poetry concerning Cadwallon. See Kirby, 'Welsh bards and the border', p. 35; *idem.*, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 85-6, and the discussion of the *Englynion Cadwallon* in Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 169-73.

³³ *HB* 62.

³⁴ R.G. Gruffydd, 'In search of Elmet', *SC* 28 (1994), p. 72; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 86.

³⁵ This is contained in *HE* III.1, the chapter subsequent to the one describing the battle.

attempting to besiege Cadwallon at an unnamed town ('*oppidum municipium*'); Eanfrith was killed on a mission to Cadwallon to negotiate terms, along with twelve of his soldiers.³⁶ Bede states that Cadwallon ruled the Northumbrian provinces for a full year, as a 'savage tyrant' [*tyrannus saeviens*]. It does appear that Cadwallon was intent upon exercising a northern dominion. This was, however, cut short when he was killed in battle against Oswald in 634 at Heavenfield (*Denisesburn*), near Hexham (Northumberland). The site of the battle shows that Cadwallon had advanced quite a distance from his home in north Wales, and this may have contributed to his defeat. Penda is not mentioned by Bede at all with regard to the later stages of Cadwallon's involvement in Northumbria, and other accounts of the battle between Cadwallon and Oswald similarly do not include Penda.³⁷ So it is quite possible that the British king was alone on this campaign.

Penda's relationship with the Britons of Wales after Cadwallon's death is not well recorded, but it does not appear to have been characterised by warfare. There is no record that he ever fought against the Britons.³⁸ Penda's documented campaigns are all against his Anglo-Saxon neighbours, and it could be argued that his success was predicated on a safe western frontier.³⁹ In this regard, there is further evidence for Penda allying with the Britons. The most secure instance of this is at the battle of *Winwaed* in 655 against Oswiu of Northumbria, during which Penda was killed.⁴⁰ Bede states that Penda was accompanied at the battle by thirty '*duces regii*', 'royal commanders/ealdormen', who had come to his aid, almost all of whom were killed, including King Æthelhere of the East Angles. In the account in the *Historia Brittonum*, where it is referred to as 'the slaughter at Gaius' Field [*strages Gai campi*]', it is more

³⁶ A. Woolf, 'Pictish matriliney reconsidered', *The Innes Review* 49 (1998), p. 159 n. 50, argues that this 'trusting' visit by Eanfrith to Cadwallon with only twelve retainers might suggest that he and Osric were in fact installed by the British king. This is an interesting possibility, but there is no hint of it in Bede and the number twelve should not necessarily be taken literally. It is as likely that both these kings were attempting to secure their realms against the aggressive Cadwallon.

³⁷ *HB* 64, '[Oswald] killed Cadwallon, king of the country of Gwynedd, at the battle of *Cantscaul*, with a great slaughter of his army'; *AC* s.a. 631, 'The battle of *Cantscaul* in which Cadwallon fell'; *VC* I.1, 'the English king Oswald ... before his battle against Cadwallon, the most powerful king of the Britons King Cadwallon was killed, Oswald returned as victor'; *AU* s.a. 632, 'The battle of Cadwallon, king of the Britons, and Ainfrith'. It is probable that in this latter account, Ainfrith's name has been recorded instead of Oswald.

³⁸ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 168; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 77.

³⁹ Finberg, 'Mercians and Welsh', p. 75; Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 137.

⁴⁰ *HE* III.24. See also *ASC* MS. A s.a. 655, 'Here Penda perished'; *ASC* MS. E s.a. 654, 'Here Oswy killed Penda at *Winwidfeld* and thirty royal children with him, and some of them were kings'. *Winwaed* is unlocated, but may have been near Leeds (West Yorks.); see Gruffydd, 'In search of Elmet', p. 66; Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 130.

specifically stated that the ‘kings of the British [*reges Brittonum*]’ who had joined Penda on his campaign against Oswiu to *Iudeu*⁴¹ were also killed.⁴² The exception was one Cadafael, king of Gwynedd, who had escaped the night before and so won the epithet ‘Battle Dodger [*Catguommed*]’.⁴³ It is thus apparent that Penda had gathered together a coalition of leaders, including Britons, who had likely campaigned in Northumbria on more than one occasion. While Penda was the junior partner in 633 with Cadwallon, he appears as senior in this later alliance.⁴⁴

The identity of the British kings who lost their lives is unknown. Jenny Rowland has recently suggested that one of them may have been Cynddylan, a king of Powys celebrated in the Welsh saga *englynion* known as *Canu Heledd*, ‘The Song of Heledd’, and *Marwnad Cynddylan*, ‘The Cynddylan Elegy’, and this suggestion has gained some support.⁴⁵ A line in the *Marwnad*, which (Rowland claims) was composed soon after Cynddylan’s death, declares ‘When the son of Pyd desired, how ready he [Cynddylan] was!’.⁴⁶ If it is accepted that the ‘son of Pyd’ is a reference to Penda, son of Pybba, this at least demonstrates a later memory of Powys being allied with Mercia. Penda may even have assumed a position of overlordship over certain British kingdoms, though it is unclear whether this would have been achieved by threat of force, or voluntarily on the part of the Britons. What is clear is that Penda had again joined with the Britons of Wales in alliance, and it may be deduced that British support was considered both acceptable and necessary.⁴⁷ From the Britons’ perspective, they do not appear to have balked at allying with an Angle.

⁴¹ The identification of *Iudea* as Stirling was discussed in Chapter 7 (*supra.*, pp. 195-6).

⁴² *HB* 64. See also *AC* s.a. 656, ‘The slaughter of Campus Gaius’; *AC* s.a. 657, ‘Penda killed’.

⁴³ *HB* 65. Strictly speaking, the account of Cadafael’s flight is included in a different chapter from the battle of Gaius’ Field, but it is usually linked with this battle. Cadafael is not found in the Harleian genealogies for Gwynedd (see D.N. Dumville, ‘Gildas and Maelgwn: problems of dating’, in M. Lapidge and D. Dumville, eds., *Gildas: New Approaches*, Woodbridge, 1984, p. 55). The similarity of the first element of his name with Cadfan, Cadwallon, and Cadwaladr, all certainly of Gwynedd, means that he probably was a member of the dynasty. See Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 130-1 n. 55.

⁴⁴ T.M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Wales and Mercia, 613-918’, in M.P. Brown & C.A. Farr (eds.), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), p. 93; Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 94-5. Bede states that it was Æthelhere of the East Angles who was responsible for the war, but this passage may be corrupt. See J.O. Prestwich, ‘King Æthelhere and the battle of *Winwaed*’, *EHR* 83 (1968), pp. 89-95.

⁴⁵ Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 131-5. Rowland’s arguments have gained support from Bassett, ‘How the west was won’, p. 116; Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 63; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 72-6, and Gruffydd, ‘In search of Elmet’, p. 66. Cynddylan’s name is not included in the Harleian Genealogies for Powys and is only known from these *englynion*.

⁴⁶ *Marwnad Cynddylan*, line 28, printed in Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 176-7. Rowland argues that the disaster lamented in *Marwnad Cynddylan* was in fact *Winwaed*. The late date of the manuscripts containing this poetry – thirteenth-century at the earliest – does necessitate some reservation regarding its usefulness.

⁴⁷ Brooks, ‘The formation of the Mercian kingdom’, p. 168; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 104.

A case has also been made by Rowland, on the basis of the *englynion*, for the involvement of Powys in the earlier battle of *Maserfelth* in 642, during which Penda defeated and killed Oswald of Northumbria.⁴⁸ This is somewhat more tenuous as it relies, in the first instance, on what Rowland calls a 'stray verse' attached to the later *Canu Heledd* which was probably not composed until the late ninth or early tenth century.⁴⁹ This verse has Cynddylan present at the battle of *Maes Cogwy* as an ally.⁵⁰ *Maes Cogwy* is the name given in Welsh vernacular sources for *Maserfelth*, and is a development from *bellum Cocboy*, the name given to the battle in the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae*.⁵¹ Assuming that Cynddylan was present as an ally of Penda, and not of Oswald, this verse again shows the later memory of a Powysian alliance with Mercia. Some support may also derive from the possible identification of *Maserfelth* as Oswestry (Salop), OE *Oswaldestreow*, 'Oswald's tree', which would still have been located within the territory of Powys in the first half of the seventh century.⁵² Rowland has suggested that, if this identification is correct, Oswald was attempting to destroy a new alliance between Penda and the Britons of Wales, one which may have been threatening to his position, given the fate of Edwin nine years earlier.⁵³ Indeed, Nicholas Brooks argues that, after Cadwallon was killed 634, Oswald installed Penda's brother Eowa as a Northumbrian puppet king in Mercia, and that

⁴⁸ HE III.9. See also ASC MS. A s.a. 642, 'Here Oswald, king of Northumbria, was killed'; ASC MS. E s.a. 641, 'Here Oswald, king of Northumbria, was killed by Penda the Southumbrian at *Maserfeld*, on 5 August'.

⁴⁹ Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 125, 387-9. D.N. Dumville, 'Palaeographical considerations in the dating of early Welsh verse', *BBCS* 27 (1976-8), pp. 246-51, has argued that the date of composition could even be as late as c.1100. The context for *Canu Heledd* is, thus, not contemporary.

⁵⁰ *Canu Heledd*, verse 111, 'I saw on the ground of the field of Cogwy / armies and battle affliction. / Cynddylan was an ally' (printed in Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 445, 494). See also Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, pp. 90-1.

⁵¹ HB 65, '[Penda] fought the battle of *Cocboy*, in which fell his brother Eobba, son of Pybba, and Oswald, king of the Northerners'; AC s.a. 644, 'The battle of *Cocboy* in which Oswald king of the Northmen (sic) and Eowa king of the Mercians fell'.

⁵² Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia', p. 93; Finberg, 'Mercians and Welsh', p. 73; Kirby, 'Welsh bards and the border', p. 36; Plummer, *Bede*, vol. II, p. 152; Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 123; M. Swanton, (ed. & trans.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (New Edition; London, 2000), p. 27; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 109. Bede's account of a Briton crossing the ground where the battle had taken place might also provide some support for this location (HE III.10). Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 74-5, questioned this 'almost universally accepted' identification, stating that the name Oswestry (*Oswaldestre*) is not recorded until c.1180 in association with a Norman castle and is based on a spurious association between the name *Maserfelth* and *Meresbyrig* (now Maesbury), the name of the manor in which the castle stood. The issue of where *Maserfelth* is to be located has been most recently examined in detail by C. Stancliffe, 'Where was Oswald killed?', in Stancliffe & Cambridge, *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, pp. 84-96, who in turn questioned Gelling's use of evidence, and ultimately stated that the argument for associating *Maserfelth* with Oswestry is very strong (pp. 89-90).

⁵³ Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 123, states that there is no reason to suppose the location of the battle to mean that Penda had conquered the border area of Powys by this time.

Eowa could have been fighting on the Northumbrian side when he was killed in 642.⁵⁴ *Maserfelth* may, therefore, have marked Penda's return to power in Mercia after an eight-year hiatus, gained with the aid of British allies.⁵⁵

In the *Marwnad Cynddylan* a British victory at a place called *Caer Luitcoed* is also celebrated, in which one Morfael carried off booty which was said to include 1500 head of cattle and eighty horses.⁵⁶ *Caer Luitcoed* is generally identified as *Letocetum* (now Wall), near Lichfield (Staffs.),⁵⁷ and so this engagement has been interpreted as an attack on Mercia.⁵⁸ Rowland has concluded, however, that this was an attack by Northumbria on Mercia, perhaps Oswiu's recovery of Oswald's relics when he 'came thither with an army',⁵⁹ in which the forces of Cynddylan were present in alliance with Mercia.⁶⁰ No antagonist is actually named in the poem, and the earlier line stating that 'When the son of Pyd desired, how ready he [Cynddylan] was!' should rather predicate alliance.⁶¹ The presence of 'book-clutching monks' at *Caer Luitcoed*, as stated in a subsequent line, also suggests a Christian Northumbrian rather than a pagan Mercian enemy.⁶² The booty – undoubtedly inflated – could thus have been repayment for service. The *englynion* regarding Cynddylan are difficult to use as historical texts, and many interpretations are possible.⁶³ However, the salient point is that they do not compel a presumption that hostility between the Mercians and the Britons was remembered in the bardic tradition.

⁵⁴ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', pp. 166-7. Brooks does not support the view that Penda and Eowa were joint rulers of Mercia (for example, W. Davies, 'Annals and the origin of Mercia', in Dornier, *Mercian Studies*, p. 21). Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 91, argues against Brooks, stating that Penda and Eowa may have separately ruled the southern and northern Mercians respectively. But as explained earlier (*supra.*, p. 374), the antiquity of this division is uncertain.

⁵⁵ This may explain the reference in *HB* 65, stating that Penda 'was the first to separate the kingdom of the Mercians from the kingdom of the Northerners'.

⁵⁶ *Marwnad Cynddylan*, lines 47-50, 52-5, 'I had brothers (in arms) – it was better while they were alive – / ?strong-handed whelps, a resolute protection. / Before *Caer Luitcoed* they caused (it): / gore under ravens, and severe arising. / They broke shields ?of warriors, the sons of Cyndrwynyn', 'The greatness of swordplay – great booty – / before *Caer Luitcoed* Morfael took it: / fifteen-hundred head of cattle and five ?... / eighty horses, and harnesses ?besides' (printed in Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 176-7).

⁵⁷ Bassett, 'How the west was won', pp. 112-13; Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 169; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 73. Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 132-3, 176-7, translates *Caer Luitcoed* directly as Lichfield. This is not strictly accurate; *Letocetum* predated and was approximately four kilometres from Lichfield.

⁵⁸ For example, Kirby, 'Welsh bards and the border', p. 37.

⁵⁹ *HE* III.12.

⁶⁰ Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 133. This interpretation is supported by Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 113; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 73.

⁶¹ *Supra.*, p. 397.

⁶² *Marwnad Cynddylan*, line 57, 'Book-clutching monks did not protect them' (Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 176-7). The implication of this line regarding ecclesiastical interaction between Mercians and Britons will be discussed in Chapter 13 on ecclesiastical interaction (*infra.*, p. 439).

As far as the evidence can reveal, for the first half of the seventh century, the principal aggressor against the Britons of Wales appears to have been the Northumbrians. Northumbrian aggression continued, if only briefly, after the death of Penda. As mentioned in Chapter 7, the *Annales Cambriae* record under the year 658 that 'Oswiu came and took plunder [*venit et predum duxit*]'.⁶⁴ This appears to have taken place during Oswiu's rulership of Mercia and so might be interpreted as Oswiu extracting some form of payment from the Britons of Wales, though not necessarily an attempt at conquest.⁶⁵ Relations between the Mercians and the Britons, on the other hand, were more obviously characterised by cooperation than conflict.⁶⁶ The Britons and Mercians appear as allies at critical episodes in seventh-century Anglo-Saxon history: at Hatfield in 633; *Winwaed* in 655; and perhaps *Maserfelth* in 642.⁶⁷ The caveat is that an alliance between peoples does not necessarily preclude conflict.⁶⁸ It has been shown, for instance, that the alliance between Eadberht of Northumbria and Oengus of the Picts in 756 did not prevent the latter from being remembered in Anglo-Saxon sources as a 'tyrannical slaughterer'.⁶⁹ Alliances between Penda and various British kings need not have prevented the expansion of Mercia in the direction of Wales.⁷⁰ In addition, there is no evidence that Penda's brother Eowa ever allied with the Britons, and his rulership may have seen hostility between Britons and Mercians.⁷¹ Nevertheless, it is the British alliances of Penda that stand out in the sources for the first half of the seventh century.

It is unknown if the British alliances of Penda survived his death in 655. There is a dearth of evidence for amicable or hostile interaction between Mercians and Britons for the remainder of the seventh century. This was the beginning of what Sir John Edward Lloyd' described as the 'age of isolation' of Wales, in which he saw the Britons drawing into themselves.⁷² Gwynedd appears to have played no further part in the

⁶³ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 169, for example, suggested that the attack by the forces of Cynddylan may have been in the time of the 'Northumbrian puppet' Eowa.

⁶⁴ *AC* s.a. 658 (*supra.*, p. 181).

⁶⁵ Kirby, *Earliest English Kings*, p. 96; Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 137. It should be noted that the entry does not state from whom Oswiu took plunder; so the identification of the Britons of Wales as the victims can only be tentative.

⁶⁶ Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 115.

⁶⁷ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 168; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 104.

⁶⁸ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 29.

⁶⁹ See note 245, *supra.*, p. 202.

⁷⁰ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 29.

⁷¹ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 169; Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia', p. 94.

⁷² Lloyd, *History of Wales*, I, p. 194. It would be tempting to include the Britons of Wales amongst 'all the southern nations' who were summoned by Wulfhere of Mercia to fight against Ecgrif of Northumbria, c.673-5 (*VW* 20), though there is no substantiating evidence.

affairs of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms,⁷³ and the fate of Powys is obscured by the lack of any surviving record for how the Mercian takeover of Cheshire, Shropshire and Herefordshire was achieved.⁷⁴ Yet the fate of Powys is a primary issue in Mercian-British frontier relations in the seventh century, especially its eastern reaches.

It is generally agreed that the West Midlands passed into Mercian, or at least Anglian, control by the end of the seventh century or slightly earlier.⁷⁵ An Anglo-Saxon bishopric, eventually located at Hereford, existed by Bede's time for the 'people who dwell west of the river Severn',⁷⁶ and this was probably established by c.680 as a result of Archbishop Theodore's ecclesiastical reforms.⁷⁷ It is also likely that Anglo-Saxon monasteries were founded at this time in the West Midlands, including several west of the Severn, for example at Much Wenlock (Salop), Leominster and Lingen (Herefords.), and possibly the minster church of St Andrew's, Wroxeter.⁷⁸ Place-name evidence also indicates the infiltration of Anglo-Saxon speech as far as the region of Offa's Dyke in Cheshire and Shropshire possibly in the eighth century.⁷⁹ The existence of a series of names along the Dyke from Oswestry to Hereford with the suffix *-sæte*, but smaller than the similarly named units in the *Tribal Hidage*, may also indicate the presence of small groups of settlers along the border with the Britons.⁸⁰ However, later movements of peoples complicate assigning a date for these names.⁸¹

⁷³ Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 116; Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 218.

⁷⁴ Bu'Lock, *Pre-Conquest Cheshire*, p. 29; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 72.

⁷⁵ See the works cited in note 9 (*supra.*, p. 391).

⁷⁶ HE V.23 (*supra.*, pp. 378-9).

⁷⁷ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 87-91. The creation of the bishopric of the Hwicce at Worcester probably occurred at the same time. Theodore's reforms were discussed earlier (*supra.*, pp. 327-8).

⁷⁸ The foundation charter of Much Wenlock included in 'St Mildburg's Testament' (*supra.*, pp. 379-80) dates to 674x690, and another (also denoted S1799) to the reign of Æthelred I of Mercia, 674-704 (H.P.R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands*, Leicester, 1972, p. 147). The foundation of Leominster is, on the basis of the *Life of St Mildburg*, typically dated to c.660 (Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 94). A 709 charter of King Coenred of Mercia records a grant of eight hides at Lingen (S1801). Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 29, 85, 92, talks of the 'charter horizon' of c.675, by which he means that this was the time from which charters began to be used as a written record of donations to monasteries. Some of these monasteries may have been in existence prior to this 'horizon'. For St. Andrew's at Wroxeter, see S. Bassett, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter and its British antecedents', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 145 (1992), pp. 1-28, and N. Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', in J. Blair & C. Pyrah (eds.), *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future* (London, 1996), p. 50. This and other West Midland minsters may have been founded in the seventh century, such as St Mary's and St Chad's at Shrewsbury, though there is no obvious positive evidence.

⁷⁹ Gelling, 'The early history of western Mercia', p. 199. Place-names that incorporate the name Penda, for example, may be early. See G. Jones, 'Penda's footprint? Place-names containing personal names associated with those of early Mercian kings', *Nomina* 21 (1998), pp. 29-62; Maund, *Welsh Kings*, p. 32.

⁸⁰ For example, *Meresæte*, *Rhiwsæte*, *Stepelsæte*, *Halhsæte*, *Temesæte*. See the continuing discussion by M. Gelling, 'The *-inghope* names of the Welsh Marches', *Nomina* 6 (1982), p. 34; *idem.*, 'The early

How the transfer of the West Midlands to Mercian control took place is uncertain. Later Welsh poetry has been interpreted as memorialising a violent conquest by the Mercians,⁸² but this evidence is now usually discounted.⁸³ Steven Bassett has recently argued that control of the West Midlands was achieved 'without major bloodshed'.⁸⁴ This can be seen to echo the work of H.P.R. Finberg in the 1960s, who theorised that the incorporation of the West Midlands into Mercia was by a process of 'peaceful evolution' and assimilation.⁸⁵ These arguments are essentially based on the lack of any record of conflict between the Mercians and Britons. Bassett hypothesised that the people of eastern Powys broke away from their British confederation after Penda's death at *Winwaed* in 655, and Cynddylan's if Rowland's analysis is to be accepted,⁸⁶ and subsequently aligned themselves with the Mercians, thereby adopting an 'English' identity.⁸⁷ A major difficulty with this 'peaceful evolution' or 'voluntary secession' argument is that it mostly relies on an absence of evidence. The silence of the Anglo-Saxon sources is not very surprising, given that the Mercians are usually only mentioned when they come into contact with other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms; the silence of the British sources may just be a reflection of their inferior record for the period.⁸⁸ Margaret Gelling, taking a different track, has stated that it is doubtful if the rulers of Gwynedd would have continued to join forces with the Mercians if they had recently overrun Powys with 'fire and sword'.⁸⁹ But the British kingdoms of Wales, as with the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, were not politically united; the demise or subjugation of one would not necessarily have incited the enmity of another. In addition, it could be said

history of western Mercia', pp. 199-201, and *idem.*, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 119-20, for a map.

⁸¹ Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 138.

⁸² For example, Kirby, 'Welsh bards and the border', pp. 36-8.

⁸³ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 72-3, 76, and especially Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 120-41. Also note the preceding discussion about *Canu Heledd* and *Marwnad Cynddylan*.

⁸⁴ Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 115.

⁸⁵ Finberg, 'Mercians and Welsh', pp. 73-8, & esp. p. 77.

⁸⁶ *Supra.*, p. 397.

⁸⁷ Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 116. See also Gelling, 'The early history of western Mercia', p. 191; *idem.*, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 77. The issue of British versus English identity will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁸⁸ Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom', p. 169. The *AC* for the seventh century, for example, is largely concerned with northern material and with Gwynedd; see Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 5; D.N. Dumville, 'On the northern British section of the *Historia Brittonum*', *WHR* 8 (1976-7), pp. 348-9; K. Hughes, 'The Welsh Latin chronicles: *Annales Cambriae* and related texts', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 59 (1973), pp. 237-9. There are, however, four instances of warfare recorded in the *AC* for the seventh century in which there is no stated antagonist: s.a. 632, 'The slaughter of the (river) Severn'; s.a. 645, 'The hammering of the region of Dyfed, when the monastery of David was burned'; s.a. 649, 'Slaughter in Gwent' (a later accretion); s.a. 665, 'The second battle of Badon'. It would be tempting to see the entry of 632 as having involved West Midland Angles.

⁸⁹ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 77.

that one of the kings of Gwynedd *did* in the end opt out of alliance with Penda – Cadafael the ‘Battle Dodger’. Gelling’s proposition does not, in any event, tell of conditions in the *second* half of the seventh century.

There is much validity in Sim-Williams’ conclusion that ‘there is still insufficient evidence to adjudicate between violent intrusion and peaceful assimilation’.⁹⁰ Mercian and British relations in the second half of the seventh century are exceptionally obscure. But it should not be deduced that the silence in the sources means that the absorption of the West Midlands was peaceful. That a substantial British substratum remained in those parts of the West Midlands which came under Mercian control, as is commonly argued,⁹¹ does not reveal the nature and means by which this control was achieved.⁹² Certainly, ‘extermination’ or removal of the native population as a whole is unlikely. But this does not preclude the taking of a region by violence or the intrusion of settlers on attractive land parcels, as appears to have occurred in parts of Northumbria.⁹³ Indeed, it is implausible that Anglian control of the region could have been achieved without any concomitant settlement; some level of intrusion may even have preceded political absorption.⁹⁴ What conclusions are to be drawn about the period may depend on whether one prefers to be guided by the evidence for alliance in the first half of the seventh century, or by the evidence for hostility in the eighth. The subject of military interaction between Britons and Mercians in the eighth century is now examined.

Military Interaction in the Eighth Century and the Building of Offa’s Dyke

It is with the commencement of the eighth century that the first clearly recorded instance of warfare between the Mercians and the Britons of Wales occurred. While warfare in the seventh century may be conjectured, it is not until the eighth that the sources explicitly identify Mercians and Britons as enemies.⁹⁵ During this century, it is commonly argued, Mercia became a threat to the very existence of one of the British

⁹⁰ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 23.

⁹¹ For example, Bassett, ‘How the west was won’, pp. 107-18; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 76-7. The survival of British identity in the West Midlands will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁹² Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 63.

⁹³ *Supra.*, pp. 167-8.

⁹⁴ Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 2. As was discussed earlier (*supra.*, pp. 371-2), there is no evidence of pagan Anglo-Saxon burial west of the Severn, but this does not preclude Anglian intrusion occurring after their conversion to Christianity.

⁹⁵ Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 104.

kingdoms, namely, Powys.⁹⁶ Thus, there is a more explicit element of hostility in the nature of frontier relations between the Mercians and Britons in the eighth century.

The first eighth-century account of hostility is contained in Felix's *Life of St Guthlac*, which was probably composed contemporaneously with, or soon after, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*.⁹⁷ In the *Life*, it is related: 'in the days of Coenred King of the Mercians [704-709], while the Britons, the implacable enemies of the Saxon race [*infesti hostes Saxonici generis*], were troubling the English with their attacks [*bellis*], their pillaging [*praedis*], and their devastations of the people [*publicisque vastationibus*]'.⁹⁸ As a hagiography, the *Life* needs to be used with caution. However, the specificity of the reference to British attacks having occurred during the reign of Coenred provides a note of plausibility.⁹⁹ This account tells of Britons raiding into unspecified Anglian territory, presumably for the purpose of taking booty or war-loot. There is certainly later evidence of raiding. Tenth-century Welsh laws, such as those of Hywel Dda, institutionalised the division of booty, which was typically cattle, from raids into bordering countries;¹⁰⁰ the 'Customs of Hereford', in *Domesday Book*, similarly show regular raiding into Wales.¹⁰¹ It might be conjectured whether slaves were taken as part of the war-loot, as was usual practice during the Anglo-Saxon period,¹⁰² and there is

⁹⁶ W. Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), p. 108; Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 140.

⁹⁷ B. Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac: Introduction, Text Translation and Notes* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 16-19; M. Lapidge, 'Felix', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 181; J. Roberts, 'Hagiography and literature, the case of Guthlac of Crowland', in Brown & Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, pp. 69-70. The work was commissioned by Ælfwald of the East Angles (713-49). A reference by the author to Bede's prose *Life of St Cuthbert* suggests that it was written after c.720, and Bede's failure to mention Guthlac in the *HE* might suggest after 731. The earliest nearly complete manuscript is in the ninth-century *Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS. 307*.

⁹⁸ *VG* 34. This passage introduces an account concerning the saint being assailed by demons disguised as a host of Britons. This should not be taken to mean that the saint was literally attacked by Britons or that there were Britons in the East Anglian fens where he was in hermitage. This was, rather, a trick of the devil, and was included in the *Vita* to show Guthlac's power over demons. See D. Banham, 'Anglo-Saxon attitudes: in search of the origins of English racism', *European Review of History* 1 (1994), p. 148; Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, pp. 185-6. The implications of this tale for Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the Britons is discussed in Chapter 13 (*infra.*, p. 463).

⁹⁹ The anecdote is considered credible by Kirby, 'Welsh bards and the border', p. 38; K. Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', in Bassett, *Origins*, p. 182; Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, pp. 121, 138; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 52; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 111. Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 101, is more cautious on account of the passage being linked with the 'British demon' story.

¹⁰⁰ M. Richards (trans.), *The Laws of Hywel Dda (The Book of Blegywryd)* (Liverpool, 1954), p. 57. See also L. Alcock, *Economy, Society and Warfare among the Britons and Saxons* (Cardiff, 1987), p. 305; E.I. Bromberg 'Wales and the mediaeval slave trade', *Speculum* 17 (1942), p. 264.

¹⁰¹ See Bromberg, 'Wales and the mediaeval slave trade', p. 263; Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 67.

¹⁰² G. Halsall, 'Anthropology and the study of pre-Conquest warfare and society: the ritual war in Anglo-Saxon England', in S. Chadwick-Hawkes (ed.), *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), p. 168; D. Pelteret, 'Slave raiding and slave trading in early England', *ASE* 9 (1981), p. 99.

mention of British slaves on the Continent in the pre-Viking period.¹⁰³ A *Llandaff Charter* suggests that Anglo-Saxons were taken as slaves; a Saxon woman is listed as part payment for some land in Ergyng in south-east Wales, possibly in the eighth century.¹⁰⁴

Another *Llandaff Charter* refers to 'great tribulations and devastations' on either side of the Wye near Hereford in the time of Æthelbald of Mercia (716-757) and the British king Ithael (of Gwent?), in which church estates were lost to the Anglo-Saxons but later recovered when a pact was said to have been struck between the two kings.¹⁰⁵ Even if the authenticity of the charter is suspect, the circumstances are certainly credible. The *Annales Cambriae* record three battles under the year 722 in which it is stated that 'the Britons were the victors [*Brittones victores fuerunt*]'.¹⁰⁶ This suggests that each battle was fought against a non-British, Anglo-Saxon enemy. One battle was at *Hehil* in Cornwall;¹⁰⁷ the other two appear to have been in Wales. One of these was at *Gart Mailauc*, possibly either Caerfaelog in Llanbister (ten kilometres north of Llandrindod Wells, Powys) or Garth Maelog in Llanharan (Rhondda Cynon Taff). The other, at *Pencon* 'among the south Britons', could conceivably be Pencoed (Bridgend) just five kilometres from Llanharan.¹⁰⁸ If these locations are correct, both battles took place well inside British territory and may indicate a concerted campaign by an Anglo-Saxon enemy, possibly Æthelbald, aimed at more than just the taking of booty. A later reference, recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* under the year 743, certainly supports this: 'Æthelbald, king of Mercia, and Cuthred, king of Wessex, fought against the Welsh [*Wealas*]'.¹⁰⁹ No location is given, but, with the king of Wessex involved, a British antagonist from southern Wales seems likely.

¹⁰³ This is in a *Life of St Eligius*, referred to by Bromberg, 'Wales and the mediaeval slave trade', p. 263, and Pelteret, 'Slave raiding and slave trading in early England', p. 104.

¹⁰⁴ LL 185 (Davies, *Llandaff Charters*, p. 111).

¹⁰⁵ LL 192 (Davies, *Llandaff Charters*, pp. 112-13). See also Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, pp. 105-6; K. Hughes, 'The Celtic Church: is this a valid concept?', *CMCS* 1 (1981), p. 8, as well as Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 52, who regard this charter as 'plausible'. The reference to a pact (*foedus*) between Ithael and Æthelbald which ended a period of warfare is attractive but problematic, and relies on the identification of 'Telpald rex Britanniae' as the Mercian king. Circumstantial evidence comes from a Hwiccan charter of 736 in which Æthelbald was styled 'rex Britanniae' (S89/BCS154). On this title, see B. Yorke, 'The vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon overlordship', *ASSAH* 2 (1981), pp. 180-1.

¹⁰⁶ AC s.a. A further battle is recorded in the AC under the year 728 at mount *Carno* (Carno in Powys?), but no adversaries are named.

¹⁰⁷ *Supra.*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁸ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁹ ASC s.a. Note also the Abingdon charter dated to 709x737 (S93/BCS155, pp. 177-9), recording Æthelheard of Wessex (726-740) and Æthelbald fighting *wealas* across the Severn, which was discussed in Chapter 3 (see note 78, *supra.*, p. 61).

These accounts suggest a time of cross-border ravaging in the first half of the eighth century in the southern half of Wales, in which land as well as booty may have been taken and retaken. The reference in the *Life of St Guthlac* to the Britons being ‘implacable enemies [*infesti hostes*]’ could imply that they had come to be considered well-known foes of the Anglo-Saxons.¹¹⁰ The ravaging could have come to involve political motivations, perhaps with Æthelbald seeking to extend his overlordship over all the kingdoms south of the Humber including the British kingdoms of Wales,¹¹¹ or at the very least could be seen as his making powerful incursions into the British heartland so as to stop British raiding. It is not clear whether there was any change in circumstances in the early eighth century between the Britons and Mercians which precipitated these hostilities, or whether ravaging was more endemic and long-standing but only happened to be revealed in the sources at this time. However, it is likely that relations between Mercia and the Britons deteriorated in the later seventh century, once the threat from their mutual foe Northumbria abated and Mercia’s own ambitions became apparent.¹¹² The quick succession of three kings in Mercia, after the comparatively long reign of Æthelred I (675-704),¹¹³ may have been seen as an opportunity by the Britons to take advantage of the inherent instability which such a circumstance is bound to have created, in addition to whatever may have been occurring in the Mercian satellite kingdoms.¹¹⁴ However, with the stable rulerships of Æthelbald (716-757), and then his successor Offa (757-796), it appears that Mercia became the primary aggressor.

There are several accounts of warfare between Britons and Anglo-Saxons during the reign of Offa recorded in the *Annales Cambriae*, some of which specifically mention Offa himself. The earliest of these accounts describes a battle in 760 fought between ‘the Britons and the Saxons – the battle of Hereford [*Hirford*]’.¹¹⁵ Hereford on the Wye

¹¹⁰ It is not certain whether this is to be judged from Coenred’s time, or from the time when the *Vita* was written.

¹¹¹ *HE* V.23. As alluded to above (see note 105) Æthelbald was styled in various charters in such a way as to indicate extensive rulership, for example, ‘*rex Britanniae*’ (S89/BCS154); ‘*rex non solum Mercensium sed etiam in circuitu populorum*’ (S96/BCS181). See Charles-Edwards, ‘Wales and Mercia’, p. 48; Yorke, ‘The vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon overlordship’, pp. 180-2, 186-7.

¹¹² Charles-Edwards, ‘Wales and Mercia’, pp. 94-5; Stancliffe, ‘Where was Oswald killed?’, p. 92.

¹¹³ The rulers of Mercia in the early eighth century were: Coenred (704-709), Ceolred (709-716), and Æthelbald (716-757). One Ceolwald may also have ruled briefly in 716. See Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 103, 111.

¹¹⁴ Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry*, p. 138.

¹¹⁵ *AC* s.a. The annal entry also records the death of Dyfnwal son of Tewdwr (*Dunnagual filius Teudubr*), but it is not clear if his death should be associated with the battle. A Tewdwr is listed in a dubious *Llandaff Charter* assigned to the eighth century (*LL* 167).

was a frontier settlement at the time; the name, meaning 'army-ford' in Old English, indicates a military establishment perhaps chosen because of its strategic location and its status as a former Roman site.¹¹⁶ The use of OE *Hirford* in the *Annales*, if the orthography is early, may affirm its establishment by the time of the battle.¹¹⁷ No aggressor, or victor, is identified in the annal, but an attack by the Britons of Gwent (or Ergyng) on an Anglo-Saxon frontier establishment would not be incredible, particularly given the evidence for cross-border warfare in the southern half of Wales during the reign of Æthelbald.

Further entries in the *Annales Cambriae* more explicitly identify the Mercians, and indeed Offa, as the aggressor. Under the year 778 is recorded the 'devastation [*vastatio*] of the south Britons by Offa', and, under the year 784, the 'devastation [*vastatio*] of the Britons by Offa in the summer'.¹¹⁸ The use of *vastatio* in these entries has been interpreted as reflecting a political as well as acquisitive motivation on Offa's part; that Offa was said to have wrought devastation may suggest a desire to extend his own rulership.¹¹⁹ It has been proposed that Ergyng, later Archenfield,¹²⁰ west of the Wye, might even have passed into Mercian hands at this time, if only briefly.¹²¹ Like his predecessor Æthelbald, Offa was one who enjoyed overlordship of several Anglo-

¹¹⁶ J. Blair, 'Hereford', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 234; Halsall, 'Anthropology and the study of pre-Conquest warfare and society', p. 164; J. Hillaby, 'The early church in Herefordshire: Columban and Roman', in A. Malpas, J. Butler, A. Davis, S. Davis, T. Malpas & C. Sansom (eds.), *The Early Church in Herefordshire: Proceedings of a Conference held in Leominster in June 2000* (Leominster, 2001), p. 58.

¹¹⁷ See the earlier discussion on the see of Hereford (*supra.*, p. 379).

¹¹⁸ *AC* s.aa. There is also an interpolated entry s.a. 796 of the 'devastation of *Reinuch* by Offa [*vastatio Reinuch ab Offa*]'. *Reinuch* might be Brycheiniog, but the reading is not clear. A further entry s.a. 797 records, 'Offa king of the Mercians and Maredudd king of Demetians die, and the battle of Rhuddlan [*bellum Rudglann*]'. This has been taken by some, for example Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 102, to indicate that Offa attacked Dyfed, thus causing Maredudd's death. However, this is interpreting more than the annal entry states. The battle of Rhuddlan (Denbighs.) has also been taken as an attack by Mercians, for example by Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 69, but again this is going beyond what is actually stated in the annal.

¹¹⁹ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 113; D. Hill, 'Mercians: the dwellers on the boundary', in Brown & Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, p. 178. In a way, these attacks could also have acted as a deterrent; in other words, Offa may have effecting a series of massive reprisals for many small Welsh raids.

¹²⁰ *ASC* MS. A s.a. 918, MS. D s.a. 915, '*Ircinga felda*'.

¹²¹ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 114-16; F. Noble, *Offa's Dyke Reviewed* (Oxford, 1983), p. 11. For what it is worth, the grants by British kings to churches in Ergyng recorded in the *Llandaff Charters* end with the death of Ffermfael ap Ithael, recorded in the *AC* s.a. 775, namely, during the reign of Offa. This region may, therefore, have been lost by the British during this time. However, the meeting between the English king Æthelstan and the Welsh rulers at Hereford c.930 (*GR* II.134.5) in which the Wye was established as the border, indicates that Ergyng did persist under Welsh rule for most of the Anglo-Saxon period (B.G. Charles, 'The Welsh, their language and place-names in Archenfield and Oswestry', in H. Lewis (ed.), *Angles and Britons: O'Donnell Lectures*, Cardiff 1963, p. 88). The region was finally politically annexed to Herefordshire after the Norman Conquest.

Saxon kingdoms;¹²² it is understandable that he would also have wanted to extend his overlordship, if not his direct rulership, in a westerly direction.

That Offa annexed Powys, at least for some period of time, may be indicated circumstantially from the evidence of the inscription on the Pillar of Elise. The Pillar was erected by Cyngen/Concenn, a king of Powys (d.854),¹²³ to commemorate the deeds of his great-grandfather Elise who is thought to have ruled in the second half of the eighth century.¹²⁴ As transcribed by Edward Llyud in 1696, part of the inscription reads, 'It was Elise who annexed (or bound) / the inheritance of Powys ... / throughout nine (years?) from the power of the English'.¹²⁵ The 'inheritance of Powys' is not explicit; nor is it certain if the whole of the kingdom was intended in this description. Powys shared a long border with the Mercians and other Angles of the West Midlands and was the British kingdom most exposed to Mercian aggression; part or all of the kingdom may have been beset. The inscription indicates that the Angles had indeed managed to take at least part of Powys into their control. If the *floruit* for Elise is accurate, this would indicate a date in the reign of Offa for the annexation, though it may only have been the Powysian recovery that occurred in his time. How the 'power of the English' was exercised remains unknown, as does the length of their ascendancy, but it does appear that British sovereignty had been displaced. The lost territory of Powys was subsequently regained by Elise after what appears to have been a nine-year struggle, indicating in this instance the ultimate success of Powys over the Mercians. It may have been this period of warfare, in which Powys was recovering territory from Mercian control, which provided the context and impetus for the building of Offa's Dyke.

Offa's Dyke stands as the most impressive, and perhaps least understood, monument of pre-Viking Britain. A series of bank and ditch earthworks, Offa's Dyke ranged along the frontier between Mercia and the Anglian West Midlands and the Britons of Wales.

¹²² See Yorke, 'The vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon overlordship', pp. 181-3, 186-9. He too adopted nomenclature in charters indicating extensive overlordship, for example, '*rex Merciorum simulque in circitu nationum*' (S116/BCS236), and '*rex et decus Britanniae*' (S155/BCS293). Offa was also addressed in a letter from Alcuin as the 'glory of Britain [*decus Britanniae*]' (*MGH Epist.* IV, no. 64, p. 107).

¹²³ *AC* s.a.

¹²⁴ *Supra.*, p. 386.

¹²⁵ Lines 6-9, 'IPSE EST ELISEG QUI NEC(?) / XIT HEREDITATEM POUO(I)S [...] PER VIII [ANNOS(?)] E POTESTATE ANGLO / RUM'. See *EWGT*, pp. 2-3, and more recently, D. Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', *The Antiquaries Journal* 80 (2000), pp. 202-3, for a full rendering of the text, which runs to at least thirty-two lines. This is the only instance I have uncovered in which a British source makes use of a variation on *Angle*, as opposed to *Saxon*, to describe the Anglo-Saxons.

The Dyke consisted of an earthen bank on the Mercian side some ten metres wide rising to a height of eight metres, with a ditch on the British side two metres deep and four metres wide.¹²⁶ As the barrier, therefore, faced to the British west, it is concluded that it was built by the Mercians in order to control the Britons in some way.¹²⁷ The traditional ascription of the Dyke to Offa derives from Asser, writing in his *Life of Alfred* over a century later, that the Mercian king 'had a great dyke [*vallum magnum*] built between Britain [i.e. Wales] and Mercia from sea to sea'.¹²⁸ While this ascription and date are generally accepted,¹²⁹ the specific purpose, context and scale of the Dyke have been a matter of some debate.

The basis for modern understanding of the Dyke is the fieldwork carried out by Sir Cyril Fox in the 1920's and early 1930's, the results of which were compiled and published in his seminal work of 1955.¹³⁰ Informed by Asser's 'sea to sea' comment, Fox was of the opinion that a frontier was established which extended the entire length of Wales, over 240 kilometres from Sedbury on the Severn estuary (Gloucs.) to the sea-coast at Prestatyn (Denbighs.).¹³¹ He recognised that only about 130 kilometres of earthwork were extant which was fairly continuous in the middle section, excepting a portion defined by the River Severn, but intermittent at either end, and relying in the south on a large stretch of the River Wye and what he thought had been stands of dense impenetrable forest. Fox also considered that some of the smaller gaps that now exist in the Dyke were original, and acted as gateways or control points for the passage of traffic. Of most significance was Fox's conclusion that while Wat's Dyke and other short dykes which can be seen in the Welsh Marches may have had a defensive function, Offa's Dyke represented a frontier agreed between the Britons and the

¹²⁶ P. Wormald, 'Offa's Dyke', in J. Campbell (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1991), p. 120; M. Worthington, 'Offa's Dyke', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 341.

¹²⁷ Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 65; D. Hill, 'Offa's and Wat's Dykes: some aspects of recent work 1972-1976', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 79 (1977), p. 21.

¹²⁸ Asser, ch. 14, '*formidosus rex, nomine Offa, qui vallum magnum inter Britanniam atque Merciam de mari usque mare fieri imperavit*'. Charles, 'The Welsh, their language and place-names in Archenfield and Oswestry', p. 85, stated that the Dyke was known in Welsh as *Clawdd Offa* at least as early as the fourteenth century.

¹²⁹ For example, Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 224; J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), p. 64; Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 110; *idem.*, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 65; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 103; Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', pp. 203-5; Wormald, 'Offa's Dyke', p. 120; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 117.

¹³⁰ C. Fox, *Offa's Dyke: A Field Survey of the Western Frontier Works of Mercia in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries A.D* (London, 1955).

¹³¹ Fox, *Offa's Dyke*, p. 277.

Mercians, 'a boundary defined by treaty or agreement between the men of the hills and the men of the lowlands ... not a military boundary'.¹³²

Since the publication of Fox's study, however, much more work has been done on both Offa's and Wat's Dykes which has caused a re-evaluation of his conclusions. In particular, the work of David Hill has shown that the received wisdom about the length of Offa's Dyke is in need of amendment.¹³³ There is no archaeological evidence that the postulated section of the Dyke north from Llanfynydd (near Mold, Flints.) to Prestatyn ever existed,¹³⁴ and the incomplete southern section from Redbrook to Sedbury cannot be securely linked with the main portion of the Dyke.¹³⁵ Hill had proposed that Wat's Dyke may have served as the northern end of the barrier,¹³⁶ but he has since described this notion as ill-conceived.¹³⁷ Indeed, recent work on Wat's Dyke has indicated that its construction predates Offa's time significantly and should, rather, be associated with the sub-Roman period.¹³⁸ It has also been demonstrated that most of the gaps which may have acted as gateways are not in fact original features but later openings.¹³⁹ Thus, Hill describes the extent of Offa's Dyke as running:

Continuously for 64 miles (103 km) from Rushock Hill in Herefordshire, which is some 8.75 miles (14km) to the north of the Wye near Mansell Gamage, to Llanfynydd, which is 3.75 miles (6km) south of Mold.¹⁴⁰

¹³² Fox, *Offa's Dyke*, p. 279.

¹³³ The recent work, much of which has been carried out by David Hill and the Offa's Dyke Project, is summarised by Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', p. 198. This includes amongst other things a large number of additional excavations involving the cutting of some 166 trenches.

¹³⁴ D. Hill, 'Offa's and Wat's Dykes – some exploratory work on the frontier between Celt and Saxon', in T. Rowley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlement and Landscape* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 102-7; *idem.*, 'The interrelation of Offa's and Wat's dykes', *Antiquity* 48 (1974), pp. 309-12; *idem.*, 'The construction of Offa's Dyke', *The Antiquaries Journal* 65 (1985), pp. 140-2.

¹³⁵ Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', pp. 198-200, citing the work of the Archaeological Service of the Gloucestershire County Planning Department, published as J. Hoyle, 'Offa's Dyke management survey, 1995-6', *Glevensis* 29 (1996), pp. 29-33.

¹³⁶ Hill, 'Offa's and Wat's Dykes – some exploratory work on the frontier between Celt and Saxon', pp. 106-7.

¹³⁷ Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', p. 205 n. 2.

¹³⁸ H. Hannaford, 'An excavation on Wat's Dyke at Mile Oak, Oswestry, Shropshire', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society* 73 (1998), pp. 1-7; Nurse, 'New dating for Wat's Dyke', pp. 3-4. Excavation at Maes-y-Clawdd near Oswestry (Salop) revealed a small hearth under the bank of Wat's Dyke, the remains of which produced a radiocarbon date centred on 446, with a primary range of 411-561AD. On this basis, Wat's Dyke should be thought of as contemporaneous with the Wiltshire Wansdyke, and perhaps was the work of the sub-Roman successors of the Cornovii. It should be allowed that Offa could have purposed to re-use Wat's Dyke in his design, but this can only be speculative. The two Dykes do appear to run parallel for approximately forty kilometres, albeit discontinuously, which would suggest that the line of Wat's Dyke was held to be redundant.

¹³⁹ Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, pp. 64-5; Hill, 'Offa's and Wat's Dykes: some aspects of recent work 1972-1976', pp. 23-5; Wormald, 'Offa's Dyke', p. 121.

¹⁴⁰ Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', p. 198. Hill has also questioned whether the 'intermittent and puzzling' short lengths of bank and ditch south from Rushock Hill to the north bank of the Wye at Mansell Gamage should be associated with Offa, and so has not included these in his description.

As well as the detail, the general thrust of Fox's notion of an agreed frontier between Mercians and Britons has been criticised as having no evidentiary basis.¹⁴¹ Frank Noble, as a result of his survey of the southern two thirds of the Dyke, postulated that it was a 'patrol line' set back from the frontier, with Anglian farmers continuing to live and work their land on the western side.¹⁴² This interpretation also founders, however, as it relied in the first instance on the presence of small gaps in the Dyke allowing patrols to ride through to protect the farmers, but as stated, most of the gaps are not original.¹⁴³ In the second instance, Noble's interpretation relied upon the potentially incorrect identification of eighth-century Anglo-Saxon place-names west of the Dyke, thus denoting the presence of Mercian settlements.¹⁴⁴ Further Mercian aggression and westward expansion in the ninth century could be as likely a context for the designation of these place-names.¹⁴⁵

The most recent assessment of Offa's Dyke suggests that its form must reflect the purpose for which it was constructed.¹⁴⁶ The sheer scale of the obstacle presented by the Dyke almost certainly militates against the conclusion that it was merely a border marker, and the lack of any advantage afforded by the structure to the Britons means that it is most unlikely to have been the result of a negotiated agreement. The lack of any original gaps in the main central section also reduces the likelihood that it was a patrolled frontier. The most probable conclusion is that the earthwork was indeed engineered by the Mercians to create a barrier against the Britons, and to afford a clear view into British territory.¹⁴⁷ This suggests that the primary function of the Dyke was a military one: to act as a deterrent to British incursion, and possibly to act as a rallying

¹⁴¹ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 101; Hill, 'Offa's and Wat's Dykes: some aspects of recent work 1972-1976', p. 32.

¹⁴² Noble, *Offa's Dyke Reviewed*, *passim*. This is an incomplete posthumous publication of Noble's Master of Philosophy thesis received from the Open University in 1977, and as such does not contain all his conclusions on Offa's Dyke. Margaret Gelling was responsible for this publication.

¹⁴³ It is also considered unlikely that Offa's Dyke was actually garrisoned; this was not normal Anglo-Saxon practice and no associated forts have been identified. So the existence of 'Dyke patrols' becomes even more improbable. See Wormald, 'Offa's Dyke', pp. 120-1; Worthington, 'Offa's Dyke', p. 341.

¹⁴⁴ Margaret Gelling has shown that these place-names do not have to be early formations, and may post-date the construction of the Dyke; see Gelling, 'The *-inghope* names of the Welsh Marches', pp. 31-6; *idem.*, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 106-11. Two place-names – Burlingjobb and Evenjobb (Powys) – were thought to have had special significance as they were supposed to contain the ostensibly early *-ingas* element, 'people of –' (M. Gelling, 'The chronology of English place-names', in Rowley, *Anglo-Saxon Settlement and Landscape*, 1974, p. 93). But this identification is far from certain.

¹⁴⁵ For example, AC s.a. 822, 'The fortress of Degannwy is destroyed by the Saxons [i.e. English] and they took the region of Powys into their own control [*et regionem Poyvis in sua potestate traxerunt*]'.
¹⁴⁶ Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', p. 200.

¹⁴⁷ Worthington, 'Offa's Dyke', p. 341.

line for Offa to launch attacks into the west.¹⁴⁸ A British force could certainly have crossed the Dyke, but it would have served as a warning that Anglian territory was being entered; made it difficult for them to bring horses with them – thus impeding their movement – and reduced the chance of their driving back any stolen livestock. As Patrick Wormald states, ‘what we now know suggests that Offa’s Dyke was an act not of peace but of war’.¹⁴⁹

Once the ‘missing portions’ at either end are discounted, the purpose of Offa’s Dyke becomes apparent: that it was constructed as a barrier between the Anglian West Midlands and the kingdom of Powys.¹⁵⁰ When the Dyke is considered in this manner, the gap to the north of the Dyke can be explained as the border with Gwynedd, and the gap to the south, the border with Gwent and perhaps Ergyng. Asser’s description of the *vallum magnum* running ‘from sea to sea’ can be reinterpreted as an overstatement; perhaps ‘river to river’ would have been more accurate.¹⁵¹ The most likely context for the building of Offa’s Dyke, therefore, emerges as the contest that was commemorated on the Pillar of Elise in which Powys was able to successfully retake land from Mercian control. That such a massive undertaking as the Dyke was even considered indicates the seriousness of the threat perceived by the Mercians, as well as the measure of the British foe being confronted. And on Offa’s part, the construction of the Dyke may well have had Roman, imperial connotations which would doubtless have appealed to a king who arguably thought of himself as an English Charlemagne.¹⁵²

Offa’s Dyke would certainly have had an impact on the border region and on relations between the Britons and Mercians.¹⁵³ Even if it was not continuously garrisoned, the Dyke must have had the effect of limiting movement, perhaps channelling any lawful traffic to river crossings such as at the Severn near Welshpool or the Teme near Knighton (Powys). The construction of a such a static boundary may also have instilled

¹⁴⁸ Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 65; Wormald, ‘Offa’s Dyke’, p. 120; Worthington, ‘Offa’s Dyke’, p. 342.

¹⁴⁹ Wormald, ‘Offa’s Dyke’, p. 121.

¹⁵⁰ Hill, ‘Offa’s Dyke: pattern and purpose’, p. 203.

¹⁵¹ Perhaps the two termini were the Clwyd and the Wye. See Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 65; Hill, ‘Offa’s Dyke: pattern and purpose’, pp. 204-5. Hill notes another early medieval description of a dyke, namely the Danevirke, which was said in the *Annales Regni Francorum* s.a. 808 to run ‘sea to sea’, but in fact did not.

¹⁵² Offa was addressed as a ‘brother king’ by Charlemagne in a letter of 796 (*MGH Epist.* IV, no. 100, pp. 144-6; *EHD*, no. 197, pp. 848-9).

¹⁵³ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 224; Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 110. A lasting effect would still have been made even if, as Maund, *Welsh Kings*, p. 150 n. 94, suggests, the Dyke was of composite origin, only connected in the reign of Offa.

the notion of a fixed border between the two peoples, if that did not already exist, and would certainly have encouraged self-definition on both sides.¹⁵⁴ This is not to say that the Dyke necessarily represented the line of a frontier that did not fluctuate after it was built; or that Mercian penetration into Powysian territory beyond the Dyke did not occur.¹⁵⁵ But such an obvious obstacle to movement between British and Mercian territory, and such a clear physical symbol of division, would have contributed to an incipient sense of national difference between Britons and Mercians.

What can be said of relations between Mercia and the other British kingdoms of Wales at this time? Of relations with Gwynedd, nothing is known until after Offa's death, when the *Annales Cambriae* records under the year 798 that 'Caradog king of Gwynedd is murdered/killed [*iugulatur*] by Saxons'.¹⁵⁶ This obviously indicates that the absence of Offa's Dyke in northern Wales should not be taken as evidence of amicable relations between the kingdoms; the fact that the centre of Gwynedd was far from the Mercian heartland, cut off by the mountains of Snowdonia, may have obviated the perceived need for a specially-constructed frontier.¹⁵⁷ The tenor of the *Annales* entry suggests a Mercian aggressor, but the circumstances of Caradog's death are otherwise unknown.¹⁵⁸ In terms of relations in the south, Offa caused devastation at least once in 778, and possibly again in the south in 784.¹⁵⁹ Territory west of the Wye in the old Ergyng, later Archenfield, may have been taken albeit temporarily by Offa at this time. It is the possibility that Offa ultimately ruled territory east *and* west of the Wye which has led some historians to seek to apply the so-called *Ordinance Concerning the Dunsæte* to this period.¹⁶⁰

The *Ordinance Concerning the Dunsæte* is a tract of nine clauses pertaining to an agreement made between some Britons (described as *Wealhðeod*) and Anglo-Saxons (named *Angelcynn*) referred to as the *Dunsæte*, one of the Old English 'settler-names' to

¹⁵⁴ J. Hines, 'Cultural change and social organisation in early Anglo-Saxon England', in Ausenda, *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians*, p. 83; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁵ The kingdom of Powys, for example, was said in the *AC* s.a. 822 to have been taken into Anglo-Saxon control.

¹⁵⁶ *AC* s.a., '*Caratauc rex Guenedotae apud Saxones iugulatur*'.

¹⁵⁷ Hill, 'Offa's Dyke: pattern and purpose', p. 205 n. 2, discounted the notion that Wat's Dyke acted as a northern border.

¹⁵⁸ It would be tempting to associate Caradog's death with the battle of Rhuddlan (*AC* s.a. 797) and argue for a Mercian campaign into Gwynedd. As stated earlier, however, no antagonists are named in reference to the earlier battle (see note 118, *supra.*, p. 407).

¹⁵⁹ *Supra.*, pp. 407-8.

be found along the border.¹⁶¹ The agreement spells out procedures to be followed for travel, trespass, cattle-theft and homicide between the two communities, divided by an un-named river.¹⁶² This river is usually identified as the Wye,¹⁶³ and hence the agreement is thought to have concerned a mixed Anglo-British population in Archenfield.¹⁶⁴ One procedure required that the responsibility for tracking stolen cattle which had passed from one bank of the river to the other should be handed over to the men of the relevant land.¹⁶⁵ Another specified that neither Britons nor Anglo-Saxons were to cross over to each other's land without being accompanied by 'the appointed man from that land' who was to 'bring them back there again without offence'.¹⁶⁶ A further provision specified that if a Briton killed an Anglo-Saxon, or *vice versa*, no more than half the normal *wergild* was payable, no matter what the social class of the victim, presumably in recognition of the trespass perpetrated.¹⁶⁷

The *Ordinance* is of unquestionable value in examining Anglo-British border relations. The problem is whether it is of relevance to the second half of the eighth century. The *Ordinance* survives in Old English and Latin in legal manuscripts of the early eleventh century.¹⁶⁸ Its context, however, is generally regarded as tenth-century; Patrick

¹⁶⁰ For example, Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 112-19; Noble, *Offa's Dyke Reviewed*, pp. 14-18.

¹⁶¹ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 204-5; Wormald, 'Dunsæte', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 146. The *Dunsæte* are not attested in any other source. The *dun*-element of the name is not clearly understood. Both Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 118, and P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Vol. I Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), p. 381, state that it is unlikely to have come from the British for '(hill)fort' as that would have given *Din-sæte*. The more probable derivation may be from OE *dûn*, modern 'down', used in the sense of 'mountain' or 'hill'. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 9, thus offered a translation of *Dunsæte* as 'hill-dwellers'. The so-named hill or mountain has escaped location. Sims-Williams also canvassed the more tentative possibility of 'dwellers near *Dunre*, i.e. Dinador' (immediately south of Hereford), but subsequently dismissed it. Noble's translation, *Offa's Dyke Reviewed*, p. 17, of 'down-river people' is also taking the name beyond what is probable.

¹⁶² *Dunsæte* 8, 8.3. A facsimile and translation of the *Ordinance* is provided by Noble, *Offa's Dyke Reviewed*, pp. 103-9; all references are by number from this edition.

¹⁶³ Other suggestions have been the Monnow/Dore, which leaves the Wye near Monmouth, or smaller streams such as the Taradr near Dinador or the Worm. See Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 9 n. 30.

¹⁶⁴ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 205; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 114; Hill, 'Mercians: the dwellers on the boundary', p. 181; Noble, *Offa's Dyke Reviewed*, p. 16; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 9; Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 381; *idem.*, 'Dunsæte', p. 146. The mention, in the *Ordinance*, of the *Wentsæte* (arguably the 'people of Gwent') as being tributary to the West Saxons (*Dunsæte* 9) has also been used to suggest an identification with south-east Wales.

¹⁶⁵ *Dunsæte* 1, 1.1, 1.2.

¹⁶⁶ *Dunsæte* 6.

¹⁶⁷ *Dunsæte* 5.

¹⁶⁸ The Old English version is in *Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS. 383 ff. 93-5* of c.1100-1125; the Latin in the *Quadripartitus* of which several manuscripts of c.1110 survive. In the context of its inclusion in these manuscripts, the *Ordinance* is part of a group of tracts affixed to Æthelred II's 994 treaty with the Viking leader Olaf. See Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 228-44, 320-3.

Wormald has stated, for example, that 'its procedures and language favour a date about the time of Æthelstan's heavy-handed negotiations with the Welsh c.930', in which the Wye was established as the Anglo-British frontier.¹⁶⁹ In its present form, therefore, the *Ordinance* post-dates Offa by approximately 150 years, and so the problems of anachronism are manifest. Frank Noble argued for its applicability to the eighth century on the basis that such a 'line of separation' as the Dyke, which he saw as extending along the Wye all the way to the Severn, would have required arrangements such as those prescribed for the *Dunsæte*.¹⁷⁰ Margaret Gelling has similarly asserted that the *Ordinance* deals with conditions on the Anglo-British border which were likely to have been 'much the same for several centuries', maintaining on general grounds that Anglo-Saxons' written laws were typically codifications of customs already in existence.¹⁷¹ But this last point is of dubious relevance; even an early code like Ine's contained laws that were almost certainly devised to deal with new situations.¹⁷² It may be that the *Ordinance* is best seen as a local initiative prompted by the circumstance of Æthelstan's negotiations of c.930, and so should not be applied to the reign of Offa.¹⁷³

The evidence for the eighth century tells of a period of sustained conflict between the Mercians and the Britons of Wales from the first decade to the last. The *Life of St Guthlac* describes the Britons 'attacking and pillaging' the Anglo-Saxons, but, beyond this reference, the main aggressor appears to have been the Mercians who intensified the level of conflict to include land acquisition and direct political control.¹⁷⁴ The construction of Offa's Dyke probably occurred in the context of the Britons of Powys reclaiming land during Offa's reign which they had earlier lost. In this regard, the Dyke is itself a testament to the strength, or perceived strength, of the Britons in counter-attack. The Dyke is also a statement; both of how far Anglian settlement and political control had penetrated into the West Midlands by the end of the eighth century, and of the line behind which Offa was unwilling to allow further land to return to British sovereignty.

¹⁶⁹ Wormald, 'Dunsæte', p. 146; *idem.*, *Making of English Law*, p. 382. This context is also considered plausible by Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 205, and Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 113. Æthelstan's meeting with the Welsh on the Wye c.930 is reported by William of Malmesbury (*GR* II.134.5). This may also explain the inclusion of the tribute arrangement between the *Wentsæte* and West Saxons.

¹⁷⁰ Noble, *Offa's Dyke Reviewed*, p. 18.

¹⁷¹ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 113.

¹⁷² *Supra.*, pp. 76-7.

¹⁷³ Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 382. Hill, 'Mercians: the dwellers on the boundary', p. 182, provides further examples of later Anglo-Welsh border arrangements.

¹⁷⁴ Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, p. 68.

Summary

The nature of military interaction between the Mercians and Britons of Wales seems to have undergone a change from the seventh to the eighth century. In the seventh, the defining feature of interaction was the military alliances between Penda and various British kings of Gwynedd and probably Powys. The eighth, on the other hand, was more clearly defined by warfare and hostility between the Mercians and Britons, the ultimate statement of which was the construction of Offa's Dyke. The motivation for this hostility no doubt included a desire to acquire war-loot on the part of both the Britons and the Mercians. However, the Mercians were also motivated by a desire for territorial expansion and political control, with their actions encompassing the devastation of southern Wales, probably Gwent, the assumption of power in at least part of Powys, and the killing of the king of Gwynedd. It is informative that when the Anglo-Saxon leaders are named in the sources, they are kings of Mercia – Æthelbald and Offa – rather than of the *Magonsætan* or *Wreocensætan* or Hwicce.¹⁷⁵ These polities are never mentioned in conflict with the Britons, perhaps indicating that they did not act independently from their Mercian suzerains. And it is Offa's name which came to be associated with the Dyke. This structure undoubtedly deepened the self-awareness of the Britons to its west, and of the Angles to its east, reinforcing a sense of difference and division. While the Mercians and Britons may have begun in the seventh century as allies, by the end of the eighth century, they were entrenched as enemies.

¹⁷⁵ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 352.

Chapter 12

Assimilation and Intermarriage

One of the features of recent work on the West Midlands has been an emerging view that a substantial British population persisted in the region after political control was lost to the Mercians.¹ The relative lack of pagan Anglo-Saxon burials, especially west of the Severn and in Shropshire and Cheshire,² implies that, in terms of ethnicity, the newcomers were in the minority, and that the main 'stock' of the population was British.³ The situation is similar to the west and north of Northumbria where it is also argued that Anglo-Saxon control was founded over a more numerous British population.⁴ The presence of *-sæte* names in the West Midlands along the border with the Britons may suggest the eventual existence of Anglian 'settlers' in this frontier region, and some Anglian presence would have been necessary for the successful absorption of new territory.⁵ It should be expected, therefore, that there was some level of contact between the peoples. This chapter will look at the evidence for Anglo-British contact in the West Midlands by first of all considering the issue of intermarriage, and then examining the extent to which the British population retained its identity.

Intermarriage amongst Angles and Britons

Evidence regarding intermarriage between Britons and Angles in the West Midlands is particularly scarce. Certainly, the British alliances of Penda imply a level of discourse and amicable contact between Britons and Mercians which might have been sealed by pacts of marriage. However, there is no indication that any such pact was ever made, and the fact that the Mercians under Penda were pagan would doubtless have turned the Christian Britons off such a notion. Indeed, there is no written evidence for any manner

¹ For example, S. Bassett, 'How the west was won: the Anglo-Saxon takeover of the west midlands', *ASSAH* 11 (2000), pp. 107-11; M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), p. 53; *idem.*, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', *ASSAH* 6 (1993), p. 55; K. Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', in Bassett, *Origins*, p. 174; P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 23-4.

² *Supra.*, pp. 371-2.

³ In referring to 'pagan Anglo-Saxon burials', I am following Bassett's definition, 'How the west was won', p. 107, of people who were buried in 'pagan fashion with Anglo-Saxon grave-goods'. In other words, this definition identifies people on the basis of their material culture. This definition also applies to Chapter 13.

⁴ *Supra.*, pp. 275-6.

of exogamous marriage between the Britons and Angles of the West Midlands. As a result, arguments for intermarriage have rested on the evidence of archaeology and of onomastics.

The archaeological evidence for intermarriage between Britons and Angles is limited, given the general paucity of Anglo-Saxon burial evidence in the West Midlands as well as the recognised difficulty inherent in identifying British graves and other archaeological remains.⁶ There are no excavated cases of intrusive Anglo-Saxon burials in otherwise British contexts, as were discovered in Ireland and the Lothians.⁷ There are, however, suggestions of Britons being buried alongside Anglo-Saxons at two cemeteries in the Avon Valley: Stretton-on-Fosse and Wasperton (Warwicks.). At Stretton, a cemetery of fifty to sixty inhumations dating from the late fifth century, several of the earliest female graves excavated contained material woven by ostensibly Romano-British methods, as well as boots with hob-nails about the toes, also 'typically' Romano-British.⁸ As most of the adult male burials contained weapons, it has been suggested that this cemetery represents a small community founded by an all-male Anglo-Saxon nucleus – perhaps a warband – who had settled and 'taken native women as wives'.⁹ At Wasperton, a similarly dated cemetery of around 200 inhumations, the picture is less certain, but it is argued that variations in orientation and in the inclusion of grave-goods are reflective of a 'mixed' British and Anglo-Saxon community.¹⁰ Burials showing Romano-British items of clothing are arguably more informative about intermarriage than those containing British jewellery; the latter is as likely to have occurred as a result of trade or the taking of war-booty.¹¹ However, this evidence is highly conjectural, and reveals little if anything of the conditions under which intermarriage may have occurred. Indeed, the 'taking of a native wife' by an Anglo-Saxon warrior could have been under conditions of extreme duress.¹²

⁵ *Supra.*, pp. 56-7.

⁶ C. Arnold, *Roman Britain to Saxon England* (London, 1984), p. 121; Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 107.

⁷ *Supra.*, pp. 239, 267-8.

⁸ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 40-1; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 22.

⁹ H. Härke, 'Finding Britons in Anglo-Saxon graves', *British Archaeology* 10 (1995), p. 7.

¹⁰ K. Nurse, 'Awkward angles: ancestral burial ground indicates gradual acculturation from British to Anglo-Saxon society', *History Today* 43, no. 7 (1993), pp. 3-4; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 22.

¹¹ *Supra.*, p. 267.

¹² To re-quote E.A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians* (Wisconsin, 1982), p. 214, 'Genteel English historians speak of intermarriage and coexistence ... it is not respectable to mention rape'.

The onomastic evidence for intermarriage between Britons and Angles principally revolves around a suite of place- and personal names which contain a variation on the OE *wealh*. There is a small number of place-names in the West Midlands which shows the element as a personal name, including Walsall (West Midlands), ‘*Wealh*’s sheltered place’, and Wallsworth in Sandhurst (Gloucs.), ‘*Wealh*’s enclosure’.¹³ However, the significance of these names rests on the assumption, first of all, that the use of *wealh* here denotes the ethnicity of the persons from whom the settlements were named, and secondly, that these names are in some way indicative of intermarriage, which need not be the case at all. Of perhaps more note is the ostensible occurrence of *wealh* in the names of four members of the Mercian royal dynasty. These comprise: a brother of Penda named Coenwalh, ‘bold Briton’, as well as his son Cūþwalh/Cundwalh ‘known/famous Briton’, included in the Anglian Collection of genealogies;¹⁴ Penwalh, ‘head/chief Briton’, the father of Guthlac referred to in Felix’s *Life* as being of ‘distinguished Mercian stock [*de egregia stirpe Merciorum*]’,¹⁵ and Merewalh, ‘illustrious/famous Briton’, the alleged first king of the *Magonsætan*.¹⁶ The *wealh* element can also be seen in the name of the western bishop Walchstod/W(e)alhstod, usually translated ‘British speaker’ or more generically as ‘interpreter’,¹⁷ and in the name of the *praefectus* Wale/Wealh who appears as a witness in a number of Worcester charters of c.755-775.¹⁸ It has been suggested that these names were given to children of mixed parentage who had some British blood, and if so some British alliance or intermarriage could be indicated.¹⁹ That *w(e)alhstod* ‘interpreter’ was borrowed into Middle Welsh as *gwalstawt* demonstrates communication between peoples speaking the two languages.²⁰ It has even been suggested that the name Penda could be an abbreviated form of a British name or title containing the *pen* element, such as

¹³ K. Cameron, ‘The meaning and significance of Old English *walh* in English place-names’, *English Place-Name Society Journal* 12 (1980), pp. 32, 46. See the earlier discussion regarding the identification of these place-names (*supra.*, pp. 85, 280).

¹⁴ D.N. Dumville, ‘The Anglian collection of royal genealogies and regnal lists’, *ASE* 5 (1976), pp. 31, 33. OE *coene* or *cene* translates as ‘bold’, OE *cūþ* as ‘known, famous’.

¹⁵ *VG* 1. This translation only holds, however, if the *pen* element is taken to be British for ‘head/chief’.

¹⁶ *Supra.*, pp. 379-80. OE *mere* is translated as ‘illustrious’ or ‘famous’.

¹⁷ *HE* V.23 (*supra.*, pp. 378-9). See also the charters S93/BCS155 and S101/BCS163 of c.726x737, where he appears as a witness.

¹⁸ S55/BCS183, S113/BCS223 and S57/BCS232. In S113, Wale attests as *praefectus* of the Hwicce. On this name, see also W.G. Searle, *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum* (Cambridge, 1897), p. 476.

¹⁹ For example, Cameron, ‘The meaning and significance of Old English *walh*’, p. 5; M. Faull, ‘The semantic development of Old English *Wealh*’, *Leeds Studies in English New Series* 8 (1975), p. 32; M.J. Whittock, *The Origins of England 410-600* (London, 1986), p. 87.

²⁰ Faull, ‘Semantic development of *Wealh*’, p. 26; D. Jenkins, ‘*gwalch*: Welsh’, *CMCS* 19 (1990), p. 63; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 40. There is no certainty as to when this borrowing may have occurred within the Anglo-Saxon period.

Pendevic, 'ruler'.²¹ His alliances with several British leaders strongly suggest that they were able to understand each other.

It is difficult to know, however, exactly what to make of these names. As Margaret Faull points out, even if the original use of *wealh* was to indicate a person of mixed Anglo-British parentage, the element was 'eventually adopted into the personal name stock and used without thought for its real meaning'.²² It is probable, for instance, that Cupwalh was named from his father Coenwalh rather than because he was born of a British parent. The identification of *wealh* in some of the names is also not certain and often relies on deductions and extrapolations from late renderings. Margaret Gelling has argued, for example, that the form of the name Merewalh is uncertain. The name could instead have been Mer(e)wald, as it appears in a number of Latin sources including 'St. Mildburg's Testament', and thus not contain *wealh* at all.²³ If this is correct, then assertions that Merewalh was of British descent founder.²⁴ There are similar problems with the name Penwalh, which appears as Penwald in two post-Conquest copies of Felix's *Life*.²⁵ These qualifications do not negate the possibility of intermarriage between Angles and Britons but rather highlight some of the problems in trying to draw definitive conclusions from personal-name evidence. The discovery of a personal name containing *wealh* in an otherwise Anglo-Saxon context is certainly worthy of notice, but it does not necessarily mean that the bearer *in that instance* was the progeny of a mixed Anglo-British marriage.²⁶

Despite the limitations in the personal name evidence, some level of intermarriage probably did take place between Britons and Angles in the West Midlands. If a substantial, even numerically superior, ethnically British population did persist in those areas of the West Midlands which came under Anglian/Mercian control, there must have been some interaction and commerce between the two peoples. That the name of

²¹ O.J. Padel, 'Personal names, Celtic', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 363.

²² Faull, 'Semantic development of *Wealh*', p. 32.

²³ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 81. *Contra* F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1970), p. 195.

²⁴ Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 176, for example, suggested that Merewalh was a Briton installed as king of the *Magonsætan* by Penda.

²⁵ That is, MSS. H and D. See B. Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac: Introduction, Text Translation and Notes* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 30-1, 39-42, 176. *Contra* Jenkins, '*gwalch*: Welsh', p. 63, who prefers to see Penwalh as being of entirely British derivation, with *walh* representing Brittonic *gwalch*, 'hawk'. Thus, Penwalh becomes 'head/chief hawk' (see note 79, *supra.*, p. 79).

²⁶ L. Laing & J. Laing, *Celtic Britain and Ireland AD 200-400* (Dublin, 1990), p. 92. Should it be assumed, for instance, that a Kentish nobleman called Wealh, who appears as a witness on a Canterbury charter of c.805 (S41/BCS318), either was himself a Briton or was of British descent?

the bishop west of the Severn was Walchstod/W(e)alhstod, the 'British speaker', is pregnant with implications regarding the ethnic make-up of his flock,²⁷ that is if the name was used with the full intent of its meaning. Perhaps this was a title or 'nickname' he acquired through his ministry.²⁸

The Survival of British Identity

To what extent can it be said that this 'substantial' British population in the Anglian West Midlands retained its British identity and for how long? There is only one written reference which locates an individual Briton anywhere in or near the West Midlands or Anglo-British border, apart from those engaged in warfare as at Chester in c.613-616. This is the man who (Bede says) crossed the battlefield of *Maserfelth* where Oswald was killed in 642, and who was called by Bede a Briton ('*de natione Brettonum*').²⁹ Accepting that *Maserfelth* is to be identified with Oswestry,³⁰ this places the man in the region of Powys.³¹ However, there is no source, such as a law-code or a charter, which specifically identifies Britons living under Mercian or Anglian control. Nor are there any 'transition sites', such as have been identified in Northumbria,³² where Angles may have taken over existing British citadels or other settlements.³³ Several Romano-British place-names were passed on, for example, Wroxeter (from *Viroconium*), Lichfield (from *Letocetum*), Penkridge (from *Pennocrucium*), and Mancetter (from *Manduessedo*),³⁴ but there is no clear evidence for uninterrupted settlement at these sites from the sub-Roman through to the Anglo-Saxon periods.³⁵

²⁷ S. Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands: the transition from British to Anglo-Saxon control', in J. Blair & R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), p. 15; Faull, 'Semantic development of *Wealh*', p. 26; Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 183; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 40, 79.

²⁸ If he was named Walchstod/W(e)alhstod from birth, however, then the name is potentially less revealing regarding the ethnic make-up of his flock. This is one illustration of the difficulty in making historical deductions on the basis of personal names.

²⁹ *HE* III.10.

³⁰ *Supra.*, p. 398.

³¹ C. Stancliffe, 'Where was Oswald killed?', in C. Stancliffe & E. Cambridge (eds.), *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, 1995), pp. 92-3.

³² *Supra.*, pp. 276-9.

³³ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 53.

³⁴ M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past – Place-names and the History of England* (London, 1978), pp. 40, 48-9, 54, 57-8. The site of *Letocetum* is, of course, not Lichfield itself but modern Wall just to the south. Similarly, Wroxeter was replaced as a political centre by Shrewsbury.

³⁵ Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 107; S. Losco-Bradley & H.M. Wheeler, 'Anglo-Saxon settlement in the Trent Valley: some aspects', in M. Faull (ed.), *Studies in Late Anglo-Saxon Settlement* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 101-2.

As a consequence of the lack of documentary and archaeological evidence, the survival of British identity in the Anglian West Midlands has principally been argued on the basis of place-name evidence. It is generally supposed that the adoption of British Celtic place-names into Old English must have taken place in a context of co-existence, and, even if the speakers of British were in a position of social inferiority, British speech and identity survived for long enough for these names to be passed on.³⁶ Some British place-names, such as Pensax (Worcs.) 'hill of the Saxons', suggest a period in which Anglo-Saxon settlers were a curiosity and linguistic contact persisted such that the names gained enough currency to pass into Old English.³⁷ However, the incidence of British Celtic place-names in the West Midlands is 'disappointingly low'. The county with the sparsest evidence is the easterly Warwickshire, and the one with the highest the westerly Herefordshire, especially in the Archenfield district.³⁸ Yet Shropshire shows a scarcity of British place-names, which is somewhat surprising given that its territory would once have been within the bounds of British Powys.³⁹ The same can be said of territory in Gloucestershire west of the Severn.⁴⁰ Old English must therefore have prevailed in the West Midlands for such a wholesale replacement of British names to have occurred, and to have done so quite thoroughly.⁴¹

These types of place-names are perhaps of less use than those which denote the British ethnicity of the inhabitants,⁴² namely, the *wealh*-names or those containing *cumbre/cumbra*, from British *Cymro*.⁴³ The assigning of such place-names implies that the relevant settlements were distinguished by their British inhabitants, who probably differed from people of neighbouring settlements by their continued use of British speech.⁴⁴ In addition, it is likely that when these place-names were created, the identified Britons were a small though distinct feature of the specific regions in which

³⁶ For example, B.G. Charles, 'The Welsh, their language and place-names in Archenfield and Oswestry', in H. Lewis (ed.), *Angles and Britons: O'Donnell Lectures* (Cardiff, 1963), p. 86; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 54.

³⁷ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 99; *idem.*, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', p. 55.

³⁸ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 55, 69; *idem.*, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', p. 54.

³⁹ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts 400-1000', in M.J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London, 1995), p. 729; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 66; *idem.*, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', p. 51.

⁴⁰ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 24.

⁴¹ M. Gelling, 'The early history of western Mercia', in Bassett, *Origins*, p. 198; *idem.*, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', p. 55; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 24.

⁴² L. Alcock, *Economy, Society and Warfare among the Britons and Saxons* (Cardiff, 1987), p. 274.

⁴³ Cameron, 'The meaning and significance of Old English *walh*', pp. 8, 10.

⁴⁴ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 55.

they lived.⁴⁵ Approximately sixteen names of this type can be found throughout the West Midlands, thirteen in *wealh* and three in *cumbre*.⁴⁶ Only one of the *wealh*-names is located in Herefordshire which, alongside its relatively high level of British Celtic place-name survival, may indicate that British speech was not exceptional.⁴⁷ Thus, Herefordshire might be compared with Elmet or Cumbria as a region where British communities would not have been a curiosity.⁴⁸ If Kenneth Cameron's analysis of the dates for the *wealh*-names is correct, they suggest the survival of British speech and therefore identity in some areas of the Anglian West Midlands into the eighth century.⁴⁹ There is some disagreement as to whether they should be dated so early, and so perhaps some *wealh*-names were formed as a result of people-movement at a later time across a fluctuating border.⁵⁰ However, it is possible that the eighth century was the time when British speech was dying out in the West Midlands such that settlements where it survived became unusual enough to attract a place-name denoting the British ethnicity of its inhabitants.⁵¹

It is principally on the basis of place-name evidence that an argument has also been made for a British origin for some of the Mercian 'satellite' provinces, or sub-kingdoms, in the West Midlands, such as the *Wreocensætan*, *Magonsætan* and *Arosætan*.⁵² It is claimed that these names represent peoples and territories which were originally British but were 'taken over' by an incoming Anglian elite, and so

⁴⁵ Cameron, 'The meaning and significance of Old English *walh*', p. 30; L. Quensel von-Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', *ASSAH* 10 (1999), p. 95.

⁴⁶ See Cameron, 'The meaning and significance of Old English *walh*', pp. 40-6; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 55-70. The place-names are as follows: in Warwickshire, two Walcots 'cottage(s) of the Britons'; in Staffordshire, three Waltons 'farmstead/village of the Britons', and Comberford 'ford of the Cymry'; in Cheshire, Walton, Comberbach 'river valley of the Cymry', and Combermere 'lake of the Cymry'; in Shropshire, three Walcots, and Walton; in Herefordshire, Walford (near Ross-on-Wye), and in Worcestershire, Walcot, and Walmer Farm (in Hanbury) 'lake of the Britons'. This list of place-names does fluctuate as a result of changes in the understanding of toponyms.

⁴⁷ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 70.

⁴⁸ *Supra.*, pp. 280-1.

⁴⁹ Cameron, 'The meaning and significance of Old English *walh*', p. 33. A date in the mid- to late eighth century is supported by Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 58.

⁵⁰ Faull, 'Semantic development of *Wealh*', pp. 33-4, for example, argues that many of the *wealh*-names could have been assigned any time during the Anglo-Saxon period.

⁵¹ Gelling, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', p. 54.

⁵² K.R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300-800* (Leicester, 1994), p. 154, for example, states that these *-sæte* names incorporate British elements. B. Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms of Early Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1990), p. 107, similarly maintains that 'many of the more westerly provinces in particular are likely to have been predominantly British creations'. See also Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 14; J. Hines, 'Cultural change and social organisation in early Anglo-Saxon England', in G. Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians* (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 83.

demonstrate the continuation of pre-existing British polities.⁵³ This possibility is certainly plausible; Elmet was a British kingdom which attracted a *-sæte* label in the *Tribal Hidage*,⁵⁴ and the British element in some of these names is quite likely.⁵⁵ There are, however, problems with this argument. The British element in certain *-sæte* names is not always indisputable. The so-called British element in *Magonsætan* is by no means clear; Margaret Gelling, the eminent authority on English place-names, has talked of her own indecision regarding the origins of the name and has most recently plumped for an Anglo-Saxon derivation.⁵⁶ Patrick Sims-Williams has similarly stated that 'there is no reason to ascribe a Celtic origin' to the *Magonsætan*, or the Hwicce for that matter, and maintains rather that these satellites were probably created in the seventh century.⁵⁷

The most consistent support for a Mercian province being of British origin has concerned the *Wreocensætan*. The name is thought to share the same British etymological derivation as *Viroconium*, the original name for Wroxeter (Salop).⁵⁸ By dint of the probable location of this province around Wroxeter and The Wrekin, it has been argued that the *Wreocensætan* were originally ruled by a British dynasty that emerged from the *Cornovii* of the Roman period.⁵⁹ This territory has also been seen as representing the Powysian sub-kingdom of Cynddylan, the British ruler remembered in saga *englynion*.⁶⁰ Steven Bassett maintains that the people of this sub-kingdom 'voluntarily aligned' themselves with the Mercians after Cynddylan's death, which, following Jenny Rowland's lead, he associates with *Winwaed* in 655.⁶¹ The continued significance of Wroxeter as a centre of power is compromised, however, by the fact that

⁵³ For example, H.P.R. Finberg, 'Mercians and Welsh', in *idem.*, *Lucerna: Studies of Some Problems in the Early History of England* (London, 1964), p. 73.

⁵⁴ It may be significant that there is also a *-sæte* name – *Cilternsætan* – associated with the Chiltern region, where it is also supposed that there was a sub-Roman British enclave. See Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 154.

⁵⁵ The *Arosætan* are named from the Arrow, which is of British Celtic origin. See Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 85.

⁵⁶ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 82; *idem.*, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', p. 53.

⁵⁷ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ *Supra.*, p. 377.

⁵⁹ For example, N.J. Higham, 'Medieval "overkingship" in Wales: the earliest evidence', *WHR* 16 (1992-93), p. 152; *idem.*, 'King Cearl, the battle of Chester and the origins of the Mercian "overkingship"', *Midland History* 16 (1992), p. 6; Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 174.

⁶⁰ S. Bassett, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter and its British antecedents', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 145 (1992), p. 23; *idem.*, 'How the west was won', pp. 112-13, 115-16. Cynddylan was discussed in Chapter 11 (*supra.*, pp. 397-8).

⁶¹ *Supra.*, pp. 397. Why the Britons in this region would want to commend themselves to a recently-defeated kingdom is not exactly made clear by Bassett; perhaps Penda's eventual successor Wulfhere was seen as a better protector than the British rulers in western Powys.

it was replaced by nearby Shrewsbury early in the Anglo-Saxon period, which could be taken as an eschewing of the British past.⁶² There is no evidence of continuous settlement at Wroxeter itself beyond the early to mid-sixth century, so it may not even have survived to the seventh century as a power centre in the region.⁶³ In the absence of any direct evidence, notions of continuity are necessarily conjecture; there is nothing indicating whether the *-sæte* names represented British polities taken over as 'working wholes' by an incoming Anglian elite, or territories defined and named by Anglian colonisers which may or may not have included British inhabitants.⁶⁴

The final piece of evidence for amicable association between Mercians and Britons in pre-Viking Britain concerns a reference in Felix's *Life of St Guthlac* that the saint had spent time in exile amongst the Britons. Felix states that Guthlac 'in years gone by ... had been an exile among them [the Britons], so that he was able to understand their sibilant [*strimulentas*] speech'.⁶⁵ Combined with Felix's earlier statement about Guthlac's martial career and warband which was recruited by warriors from 'various races [*diversarum gentium*]',⁶⁶ perhaps the saint's early life can be likened with that of the sons of Æthelfrith who were raised in exile amongst the Dalriadans and who probably fought alongside them.⁶⁷ Perhaps the saint was a hostage or was in fosterage at a British court.⁶⁸ Indeed, he must have been in exile for some time, if he learned to speak the British language. If the reference to Guthlac's exile can be relied upon – and it does occur in the context of a story about demon attack⁶⁹ – this is the only piece of evidence that such an eventuality ever occurred for a Mercian, and for one of noble stock. In the context of the late seventh century, when Guthlac was in his youth, it would be extremely useful to know the exact British kingdom or territory to which the saint was exiled and so whether the event can reveal anything of the manner in which

⁶² Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 174.

⁶³ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 25, notes that there are also few British place-names in the region.

⁶⁴ Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 154; Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 174. Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 82, states that the reason why some *-sæte* names contain British elements is that these elements are usually linked to the names of prominent landmarks which may have been passed on by British inhabitants, rather than an indication of any deeper level of institutional continuity.

⁶⁵ VG 34.

⁶⁶ VG 17.

⁶⁷ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', in M.P. Brown & C.A. Farr (eds.), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), p. 91; S.S. Evans, *The Lords of Battle: Image and Reality of the Comitatus in Dark-Age Britain* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 28; H.R. Loyn, 'The conversion of the English to Christianity: some comments on the Celtic contribution', in *idem.*, *Society and Peoples: Studies in the History of England and Wales, c. 600-1200* (London, 1992), p. 31.

⁶⁸ As suggested by Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London, 1989), p. 10.

the West Midlands were subsumed into Mercia. If Guthlac was in exile within a British kingdom, this suggests that the kingdom in question was independent from Mercia at the time.⁷⁰ It is often assumed that Guthlac's warband was active on the western borders of Mercia, fighting *against* the Britons,⁷¹ but there is nothing in the *Life* which says this. However, there does not seem to be any hagiographical reason for the invention of Guthlac's understanding of British speech and for his exile. Guthlac's time amongst the Britons may, therefore, have been authentic.

Summary

There is much in question regarding interaction between Britons and Angles in the West Midlands; even the biological identity of those buried with grave-goods in ostensibly Anglo-Saxon cemeteries is not certain.⁷² Yet, for a region where it is supposed that there was a high rate of ethnic British continuity, there is a conspicuous lack of evidence for the survival of a British identity, even considering the inadequacy of the source material. Beyond the scattering of *wealh*- and *cumbre*-names, there is little which suggests any sense of identifiable 'Britishness'. Intermarriage probably occurred between Angles and Britons, even if there is no direct record of this, and this may have been a mechanism for integration of the two peoples. Facilitated by a mutual linguistic familiarity, as would have been necessary for any Mercians who found refuge in exile amongst the Britons, cultural exchange should have been a by-product of such unions. However, in the West Midlands it seems that Anglo-Saxon culture and language became dominant and did so quite rapidly, such that Old English personal and place-names prevailed. Any memories of a British past were forgotten, probably suppressed by the dominant success culture of the Anglo-Saxons.

⁷⁰ Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', p. 97.

⁷¹ For example, Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, p. 3; D.P. Kirby, 'Welsh bards and the border', in A. Dornier (ed.), *Mercian Studies* (Leicester, 1977), p. 38; J. Roberts, 'Guthlac, St', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 222.

⁷² Bassett, 'How the west was won', pp. 116-17.

Chapter 13

Ecclesiastical Interaction

If most of the Britons remained in the West Midlands after political control was lost to the incoming Anglo-Saxons,¹ this should mean *a priori* that British identity and culture survived to a greater degree here than in the east and south of Anglo-Saxon England. Nevertheless, it is difficult to uncover more than indirect evidence for Britons in the West Midlands, or for the survival of British culture. However, one of the indicators of identity and avenues of influence not yet considered is Christianity.

The evidence of Gildas, and the involvement of the Bangor-is-Coed monks from north-east Wales at the synod of Augustine's Oak near the more southern region of the Hwicce,² suggests that the British church in Wales had developed some sense of a common identity.³ In this respect, British Christianity may have operated as a 'rallying point' of resistance against the Mercians and West Midland Angles.⁴ Yet, of the three regions analysed in the present thesis, it is with regard to the West Midlands that the strongest arguments are made for the contribution of British Christianity to the nascent Anglo-Saxon church.⁵ Mercia was almost the last of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to convert to Christianity; Bede states that Penda only allowed a Christian mission to preach there two years before his death in 655.⁶ In contrast, Bede says virtually nothing of any missions amongst the Mercian satellites farther to the west and south-west such as the Hwicce, *Wreocensætan* and *Magonsætan*.⁷ This is significant, as Bede is the

¹ *Supra.*, p. 417.

² *Infra.*, pp. 453-4.

³ C. Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', in R. Gameson (ed.), *St Augustine and the Conversion of England* (Stroud, 1999), p. 116.

⁴ L. Quensel von-Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', *ASSAH* 10 (1999), p. 95.

⁵ For example, S. Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands: the transition from British to Anglo-Saxon control', in J. Blair & R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 13-40; J. Blair, 'Churches in the early English landscape: social and cultural contexts', in J. Blair & C. Pyrah (eds.), *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future* (London, 1996), p. 6; K. Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', in Bassett, *Origins*, p. 175; K. Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', in A. Malpas, J. Butler, A. Davis, S. Davis, T. Malpas & C. Sansom (eds.), *The Early Church in Herefordshire: Proceedings of a Conference held in Leominster in June 2000* (Leominster, 2001), p. 137; P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 78-9.

⁶ *HE* III.21.

⁷ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 13; M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), p. 95; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 55.

principal and often only source for the process of conversion in Anglo-Saxon England, and his silence leaves the West Midlands in something of a vacuum in terms of how conversion to Christianity occurred.

It can be accepted, however, that any Britons living in the region were almost certainly Christian by the time Anglo-Saxons arrived there in the sixth and early seventh centuries.⁸ The relative lateness of their arrival compared to other parts of Britain means that a native church would have had a longer period of time in which to become established and to found its own ecclesiastical sites.⁹ As a result, it has been hypothesised that, in the West Midlands, the incoming pagan Anglo-Saxons found an existing British ecclesiastical structure from which they learned their Christianity, and did so prior to the activities of Irish/Columban or Roman missionaries presumed to be operating in the region from the 650s onwards. Steven Bassett, for example, argues that '[the British church] converted the immigrants ... [and] left the missionaries from Canterbury and Iona with little left to do here – and Bede with little to report'.¹⁰ The issue of continuity from British to Anglo-Saxon Christianity in the West Midlands, therefore, varies from that which has been argued for the west of Wessex, where it was maintained that the *already-formed* Roman-style church of the West Saxons harnessed an existing structure through the course of their westward expansion during the seventh century.¹¹

This chapter will examine the issue of continuity from British to Anglo-Saxon Christianity in the West Midlands. In addition, what might be termed 'institutional interaction' between the church in Wales and the Anglo-Saxon church will be considered. Specifically, this refers to Augustine of Canterbury's meetings with the British bishops – the so-called synod of 'Augustine's Oak', c.602-604 – as well as the eventual acceptance by the Britons of Wales of the Roman Easter in 768. Evidence will

⁸ *Infra.*, pp. 432-3.

⁹ D. Brook, 'The early Christian church east and west of Offa's Dyke', in N. Edwards & A. Lane, (eds.), *The Early Church in Wales and the West* (Oxford, 1992), p. 77.

¹⁰ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 39. Steven Bassett is the most consistent proponent of this thesis: see also *idem.*, 'Churches in Worcester before and after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 69 (1989), pp. 225-56; *idem.*, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter and its British antecedents', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 145 (1992), pp. 1-28; *idem.*, 'How the west was won: the Anglo-Saxon takeover of the west midlands', *ASSAH* 11 (2000), pp. 107-18. His conclusions are accepted by Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 65; Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', p. 50; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, pp. 238-9. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 75-83, has independently mounted a similar argument, though with much more reserve than Bassett.

¹¹ *Supra.*, pp. 91-2.

also be considered for Anglo-British attitudes in the region. First, the evidence for Christianity in Wales and the British West Midlands will be explored.

British Christianity in Wales and the West Midlands

The presence of Christianity in Britain from at least the third century was noted in Chapter 5, as was the possible attendance of a priest and a deacon from Cirencester, provincial capital of *Britannia Prima*, at the Church Council at Arles in 314.¹² While Roman Britain's famous martyr, St Alban, is not associated with the region of current interest, the presence of the less well-known martyrs Julius and Aaron at Caerleon brings at least part of Wales within the Christian milieu of the time.¹³ Julius and Aaron were soldiers, and so not necessarily representative of the local population.¹⁴ Yet if it is accepted that much of Wales was likely to have been a military zone and that most fourth-century emperors encouraged Christianity in the army,¹⁵ it can be presumed that Christianity would have spread into the West Midlands and Wales in the fourth century.

As with the north of Britain, physical evidence for Christianity in Wales and the West Midlands during the Roman period is slight. Most of Wales shows little burial evidence for Christianity, no doubt influenced by the low level of Romanisation except in the south-east.¹⁶ It is here that the only clear indication of Roman-period Christianity in Wales has been found, in the form of a fragmentary pewter bowl with a chi-rho graffito discovered at Caerwent, the *civitas* capital of the Silures.¹⁷ In the West Midlands, which is the more crucial area in terms of the continuity debate, material evidence for Roman-period Christianity is similarly scarce. At Cirencester, a Christian formula which can be rearranged to form the words *pater noster* was found scratched into the wall plaster of a Roman-period home; however, no identifiably Christian burials have

¹² *Supra.*, p. 88.

¹³ '*Legionum urbis cives*' (*DEB* 10.2) is generally identified as Caerleon. The martyrdom of Julius and Aaron is considered to have taken place c.250-260 AD. See W. Davies, 'The church in Wales', in M.W. Barley & R.P.C. Hanson (eds.), *Christianity in Britain, 300-700* (Leicester, 1968), p. 136; C. Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* (Berkeley, 1981), p. 48.

¹⁴ Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', p. 100.

¹⁵ *Supra.*, pp. 290-1.

¹⁶ Quensel von-Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', p. 93.

¹⁷ N. Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', in Blair & Pyrah, *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future*, p. 50; N. Edwards & A. Lane, 'The archaeology of the early church in Wales', in *idem.*, *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, p. 8. The bowl was found with late fourth-century pottery and has been interpreted as an *agape* set, used for early Christian suppers.

yet been located in the town.¹⁸ Farther to the north at Wall (*Letocetum*), a single bronze bowl with a chi-rho monogram has been discovered which suggests Christian activity.¹⁹ A Christian presence has also been implied from less diagnostic finds and from building structures at Worcester, Kenchester and Gloucester,²⁰ however, no clear sign of Christian activity has been uncovered at other Roman towns such as Wroxeter and Chester.²¹ Despite the equivocal nature of the archaeological evidence, it has been suggested that by the end of the fourth century, when Emperor Theodosius banned the public practice of paganism, there would have been Christians and indeed bishops in most *civitas* capitals and major towns in Britain.²²

The paradox of early British Christianity is that, after the Romans withdrew from Britain, Christianity appears to have become the dominant religion.²³ This was especially the case in the west of Britain, where Christianity was in fact *less* evident during the Roman period when compared to the more Christianised east and south.²⁴ There is satisfactory evidence for its practice in British Wales in the sub-Roman period. Gildas's diatribe allows the presumption of a Christian society with a vigorous church hierarchy of bishops (*episcopi*), priests (*presbyteri*) and deacons (*diaconi*),²⁵ though there is no mention of archbishops or metropolitans, and a budding monastic culture.²⁶

¹⁸ C.A. Snyder, *An Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons A.D. 400-600* (Pennsylvania, 1998), p. 212. Over 400 skeletons have been excavated, the majority of fourth- or early fifth-century date. See Edwards & Lane, 'The archaeology of the early church in Wales', p. 6, regarding the identification of Christian burials.

¹⁹ C.A. Snyder, *Sub-Roman Britain (AD 400-600): A Gazetteer of Sites* (Oxford, 1996), p. 42.

²⁰ R.M. Bryant, 'St Mary de Lode, Gloucester', *Bulletin of the Council for British Archaeology, Churches Committee* 13 (1980), pp. 15-18; Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', pp. 104-5; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 212. The Upton Bishop church frieze, near the former *Ariconium* (Weston-under-Penyard), might also be Roman. See Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', pp. 107-9.

²¹ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 23; Snyder, *Sub-Roman Britain*, pp. 38-9.

²² In the West Midlands, this would therefore include: Cirencester, Gloucester, Wroxeter and perhaps Wall and Kenchester (very little evidence has been uncovered for Roman Worcester). See Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester', pp. 226-8 & n. 16; *idem.*, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 20; K.R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300-800* (Leicester, 1994), pp. 65-7; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 120; Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp. 195-215. However, with the possible exception of Gloucester, there has been no convincing identification of a Roman period church building in any of these towns. See Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 237.

²³ *Supra.*, pp. 89, 291.

²⁴ Quensel von-Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', p. 95; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 115.

²⁵ *DEB* 65.1, 66.1, 67.1-4, 109.2. Gildas also refers to *sacerdotes* – a term which embraces both *presbyteri* and *episcopi* (*supra.*, p. 293) – as well as *clerici*, *pastores*, *ecclesiastici*, *ministri* and so forth. The evidence of Gildas was discussed in Chapter 5 (*supra.*, pp. 89-90).

²⁶ D.N. Dumville, 'The origins and early history of Insular monasticism: aspects of literature, Christianity, and society in Britain and Ireland, A.D. 400-600', *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies, Kansai University*, 30 (1997), pp. 85-107; M. Herren, 'Gildas and early British monasticism', in A. Bammesberger & A. Wollmann (eds.), *Britain 400-600: Language and History* (Heidelberg, 1990),

The sophistication of Gildas's prose style suggests the availability of some form of classical education, as well as others who were able to read and appreciate what he wrote.²⁷ Indeed, Gildas tells of Maelgwn of Gwynedd's training under a '*magister elegans*',²⁸ a term which might have described a classical *rhetor*.²⁹ The existence of the 'most famous monastery [*nobilisimmo monasterio*]' of Bangor-is-Coed (*Bancornaburg*), as described by Bede, which was flourishing c.600, affirms the success of monasticism in British Wales.³⁰

Though it remains difficult to locate the places of Gildas's British church, his evidence is supported in the main by the distribution and epigraphy of the Class I inscribed memorial stones in Wales. There are approximately 130 surviving Class I memorial stones in the region, that is those which are dated to the late fifth to seventh century and typically inscribed in Latin with some also displaying the Irish ogham script.³¹ While not all of the stones are necessarily indicative of Christianity, as opposed to *Romanitas*, they stand as evidence for continued Latin literacy in Wales. And their distribution, which is predominantly in the 'highland zone' of western, central, and northern Wales, and not in the more Romanised south-east nor the West Midlands, suggests an extant native British Latin tradition which was not simply a sub-Roman archaism.³² Significantly, the epigraphy and Latin formulae of the stones corroborate the ecclesiastical structure implied by Gildas to the extent of revealing commemorations for

pp. 71-76; Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, p. 348. For a summary of the characteristics of British Christianity which can be gleaned from Gildas, see Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, pp. 123-4.

²⁷ M. Lapidge, 'Gildas's education and the Latin culture of sub-Roman Britain', in M. Lapidge & D.N. Dumville (eds.), *Gildas: New Approaches* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 40-8; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 116.

²⁸ *DEB* 36.1.

²⁹ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The context and uses of literacy in early Christian Ireland', in H. Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 64-5; P. Sims-Williams, 'The uses of writing in early medieval Wales', in Pryce, *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, p. 18.

³⁰ *HE* II.2. Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 116, suggests that the *doctores* of Bangor-is-y-Coed may have belonged to the same literary tradition as Gildas.

³¹ K.R. Dark, 'Epigraphic, art historical and historical approaches to the chronology of inscribed stones', in Edwards & Lane, *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, p. 53; J.K. Knight, 'The early Christian Latin inscriptions of Britain and Gaul: chronology and context', in Edwards & Lane, *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, p. 50. There are over 400 memorial stones of all classes in Wales, and up to 240 Class I stones from western Britain as a whole; see W. Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), p. 217; A. Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', in H. Goetz, J. Jarnut & W. Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 355-6. See notes 20 & 21 (*supra*, p. 91), for a description of Class or Category I memorial stones.

³² This issue is cogently discussed by Sims-Williams, 'The uses of writing in early medieval Wales', pp. 18, 28-9. A distribution map is provided by Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 118. There is one memorial stone in the West Midlands which stands as an outlier to this general distribution, the 'Cunorix stone' at Wroxeter, and this will be discussed presently (*infra*, p. 433).

men described as *sacerdotes* (probably bishops in this context) and *presbyteri*.³³

Corroboration of Gildas is also provided by the *Life of St Samson*, where it is said that the saint was ordained a deacon and then a priest in the early sixth century by a bishop Dubricius, as well as being educated at the monastic school of St Illtud, probably at Llantwit Major (Vale of Glamorgan).³⁴ Further sub-Roman Christian sites and cemeteries in Wales have been suggested on the basis of archaeological evidence.³⁵

Given this generally positive evidence for British Christianity in sub-Roman Wales, it would be logical to conclude that those Britons who were then living in the West Midlands were also Christian. Some evidence suggests the existence of Christian places in the southern West Midlands: the *Life of St Samson* mentions an oratory founded by the saint (probably before c.550) in a *castellum* located near the Severn.³⁶ In addition, some of the towns in the region, such as Chester, Gloucester, and Wroxeter, show signs of sub-Roman occupation;³⁷ it might be presumed that the Christian element amongst their inhabitants also survived. This would have been especially likely for those towns which had a bishop. There is, however, little physical evidence of Christianity being practised in the West Midlands during the period.³⁸ A possible timber mausoleum or

³³ For example, a Class I memorial stone from Bodafon (Gwynedd) reads: 'SANCT/INVS / SACER (dos) / I[N] P (ace)', 'Sanctinus the bishop [lies here] in peace' (*ECMW*, no. 83). Two more from Capel Anelog, Caernarfonshire read: 'VERACIVS / PBR (presbyter) / HIC IACIT', 'Veracius the priest lies here' (*ECMW*, no. 77), and 'SENACVS / PRSB (presbyter) / HIC IACIT / CVM MULTITV/D (I) NEM / FRATRVM // PRESB[IT]E[R]', 'Senacus the priest lies here with the multitude of the brethren. Priest' (*ECMW*, no. 78). This latter epitaph implies that the priest was interred in a monastic cemetery. See Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 158; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, pp. 123-5.

³⁴ *VS* I.7, I.8, I.15. See also the introduction by T. Taylor (trans.), *The Life of St. Samson of Dol* (London, 1925), pp. xi-xii, and K. Hughes, 'The Celtic Church: is this a valid concept?', *CMCS* 1 (1981), p. 4.

³⁵ Beyond the sites of memorial stones, evidence for sub-Roman Christianity has been uncovered at locations including: Caerwent and Caldy Island in the south; Dinas Emrys, Llandegai, Gwytherin and Tandderwen in the north, and Plas Gogerddan in central Wales. Other suggested sites with less certain evidence include: Glan-y-Mor, Dinas Powys, Merthyr Mawr and Carmarthen in the south; Caer Gybi and Caernarfon in the north. See Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', pp. 50-1; Edwards & Lane, 'The archaeology of the early church in Wales', pp. 8-11; H. James, 'Early medieval cemeteries in Wales', in Edwards & Lane, *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, pp. 90-103; Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', p. 111; Snyder, *Sub-Roman Britain*, pp. 153, 188-92, 197, 213.

³⁶ *VS* I.40, I.41. See Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 80. The *Llandaff Charters*, for what they are worth, contain grants concerning early churches principally west of, and some bordering, the Wye in Ergyng, a region eventually subsumed into Herefordshire. But given that this region may not have finally passed into Anglo-Saxon control until the eleventh century, this evidence is not specifically useful in revealing the state of sub-Roman British Christianity in what became the Anglo-Saxon West Midlands. See W. Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm: Studies in the Llandaff Charters* (London, 1978), pp. 121-4; *idem.*, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth, 1979), pp. 35-7; Hughes, 'The Celtic Church: is this a valid concept?', pp. 7-9; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 77-8.

³⁷ Snyder, *Sub-Roman Britain*, pp. 38-44.

³⁸ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 17; Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', p. 100; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 59.

church has been identified in Gloucester on the site of a Roman town-house.³⁹ On the other hand, no evidence has been found for sub-Roman Christianity at Chester, despite its proximity to the known monastery of Bangor-is-Coed.⁴⁰ Evidence for sub-Roman Christianity at Wroxeter is also uncertain, which is curious as there is good evidence for the continuation of a well-ordered community there into the fifth and sixth centuries.⁴¹ There is the inscribed memorial stone to 'Cunorix' discovered outside the town walls, generally dated to the late fifth century; this at least demonstrates a sub-Roman burial.⁴² However, the Latin on the inscription is minimal and it appears to commemorate an Irishman who may have been a mercenary or high-status visitor to the town rather than a resident.⁴³ Nothing else of an explicitly Christian nature has yet been found at the site.⁴⁴

The argument for continuity from Romano-British to Anglo-Saxon Christianity in the West Midlands has, then, to rest on an insubstantial foundation. The lack of physical evidence for British Christianity in the region does not necessarily mean an absence of churches or Christian communities.⁴⁵ And the evidence discussed concerning Wales suggests that there should also have been an active British church in the West Midlands.⁴⁶ Yet its presence is elusive. What is the evidence, therefore, for ecclesiastical continuity in the West Midlands?

Bassett rightly points out that the physical evidence for Christianity in the West Midlands is not substantially better for the seventh or eighth centuries.

³⁹ Bryant, 'St Mary de Lode, Gloucester', p. 16; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, pp. 154-5. This site will be discussed in more detail in the following section (*infra.*, p. 443).

⁴⁰ Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', p. 51; Snyder, *Sub-Roman Britain*, pp. 38-9.

⁴¹ P. Barker (ed.), *From Roman 'Viriconium' to Medieval Wroxeter* (Worcester, 1990), *passim*; Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 35; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 21-7; Snyder, *Sub-Roman Britain*, pp. 43-4.

⁴² The inscription reads 'CUNORIX / MACUS MA / QUI COLINE', and may be interpreted as 'Cunorix (Hound King?), son of Maqui Coline (Son-of-the-Holly?)'. See Snyder, *Sub-Roman Britain*, n. 374, and especially R.P. Wright & K.H. Jackson, 'A late inscription from Wroxeter', *The Antiquaries Journal* 48, part 2 (1968), pp. 296-300.

⁴³ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 25-6. Others, for example, J. Blair, 'The Anglo-Saxon church in Herefordshire: four themes', in Malpas et al, *The Early Church in Herefordshire*, p. 4, have suggested the Cunorix stone might indicate how far inland from the Welsh coast Irish settlement had penetrated. But it must be acknowledged that this stone is very much an outlier from the general distribution of Class I memorial stones.

⁴⁴ The only apparent, though far from reliable, indication of Christianity is the so-called 'Wroxeter letter'. This was a thin lead tablet found in Bath in 1880, written from *Viriconium* (i.e. Wroxeter) containing what might be an allusion to an eastern heretical sect. See Thomas, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, pp. 126-7. Ecclesiastical continuity at Wroxeter is discussed further below (*infra.*, pp. 449-50).

⁴⁵ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 59.

⁴⁶ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 19; Brook, 'The early Christian church east and west of Offa's Dyke', p. 77; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 79; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 115-16.

Continuity from British to Anglo-Saxon Christianity in the West Midlands

The question of continuity from British to Anglo-Saxon Christianity in the West Midlands involved consideration of two main issues. The first is whether the incoming pagan Anglo-Saxons were converted by the Christian Britons whom they encountered in the region, particularly given the probable presence of a sub-Roman British church. This hypothesis is peculiar to Anglo-British interaction in the West Midlands, as opposed to other frontiers of interaction. The second issue concerns the extent to which British Christian centres continued or were retained by the nascent Anglo-Saxon church. Thus, as the West Saxon church may have harnessed an existing British structure in the west of Wessex, how much did the Anglo-Saxon church in the West Midlands preserve what it found already in place?

Evidence for the Conversion of Pagan Anglo-Saxon Immigrants

The issue of whether the pagan Anglo-Saxon immigrants to the West Midlands were converted by their British neighbours is one which relies on the coincidence of two types of negative evidence: the absence of so-called pagan Anglo-Saxon burials beyond the sixth century, and the lack of an early and reliable conversion narrative for the Anglian West Midlands. There appears to have been a cessation of pagan Anglo-Saxon burials east of the Severn in the region of the Hwicce by the seventh century.⁴⁷ For an area which yielded several hundred burials assignable to the sixth century, this change in mortuary practice away from furnished inhumations and cremations is significant, especially as it seems to have occurred rather earlier here than in other parts of Anglo-Saxon England.⁴⁸ In addition, no excavated Anglo-Saxon burials have been found west of the Severn in the region of the *Magonsætan*, or farther north amongst the *Wreocensætan* in Shropshire, or in Cheshire. The accompanied burial rite, therefore, not only ceased to be of importance in the region of the Hwicce where it had been practised, but never even became established farther west amongst those peoples beyond and north of the Severn.⁴⁹

What this suggests is that some cultural change occurred amongst the Angles in the West Midlands some time around the end of the sixth century such that previous rites

⁴⁷ *Supra.*, pp. 371-2.

⁴⁸ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 64.

⁴⁹ Bassett, 'How the west was won', p. 113; Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 175; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 71.

ceased to be used.⁵⁰ Although there should not be an automatic association between the discontinuation of depositing grave-goods and the adoption of Christianity,⁵¹ the most plausible explanation nevertheless is to attribute this change in burial rite to Christianisation. Yet there is no narrative of an early conversion by Roman or Irish/Columban or Northumbrian missionaries in the written evidence for Christianity in the Anglian West Midlands; indeed, Bede reveals practically nothing of the process of Christianisation in the region.⁵² When the Angles of the West Midlands appear in Bede's account they are already Christian. Regarding the Hwicce, Bede first allusion to Christianity occurs in the context of Bishop Wilfrid's evangelisation of the pagan South Saxons, c.680.⁵³ Here it is learned that Queen Eaba 'had been baptised in her own country, the province of the Hwicce [*Huicciorum provincia*]', and that her brother Eanhere and father Eanfrith, along with their people, were also Christian.⁵⁴ Both these men appear to have flourished prior to the reign of Osric (c.675-679).⁵⁵ Bede also reports on the cleric Oftfor, who visited the province of the Hwicce during the reign of Osric and who 'preached the word of faith' before being created bishop, and of Bosel, who had been bishop of the province before Oftfor.⁵⁶ It can be concluded, therefore,

⁵⁰ Or at least amongst those people using Anglo-Saxon burial practice. Bassett, 'How the west was won', pp. 113-15, has recently offered the intriguing but convoluted hypothesis that the people buried in these sixth-century Anglo-Saxon-style graves were in fact communities of Britons who adopted the rite for reasons of upward social mobility, but then 'changed back' to the unaccompanied British rite in the seventh century. While the adoption of a foreign cultural rite for one's self-promotion is plausible, the 'change-back' notion requires the assumption that Christian Britons began being buried with Anglo-Saxon grave-goods, if not actually apostatising, and then ceased to do this within the space of a generation or two. With a lack of any other evidence to the affirmative, it would be more elegant to interpret the people in the graves as Anglo-Saxon immigrants.

⁵¹ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 71-2, notes for example that the cessation of accompanied burials on the Continent may have reflected the influence of Mediterranean or late-Roman customs rather than the influence of Christianity. Others (e.g. Edwards & Lane, 'The archaeology of the early church in Wales', p. 6) have shown that west-east orientation is not exclusively Christian as opposed to pagan. And indeed, there was a period of overlap in practice. On the relationship between Christianity and burial custom, see also H. Geake, 'Burial practice in seventh- and eighth-century England', in M.O.H. Carver (ed.), *The Age of Sutton Hoo: The Seventh Century in North-Western Europe* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 89-93; *idem.*, *The Use of Grave-Goods in Conversion-Period England, c. 600-800* (Oxford, 1997), *passim*, and E. O'Brien, 'Past rites, future concerns', in Blair & Pyrah, *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future*, pp. 160-1.

⁵² *Supra.*, pp. 427-8.

⁵³ *HE* IV.13.

⁵⁴ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 18, attempts to date these events to an earlier time, by recourse to a reference in the *ASC* s.a. 661 to the baptism of Eaba's king Æthelwealh at the behest of Wulfhere of Mercia. He claims that Bede's explanation of Eaba being 'already baptised' implies that she was baptised prior to her husband, and thus prior to 661. A more plausible reading, rather, is that Eaba was 'already baptised' in her own province before she came to the South Saxons to marry Æthelwealh, not that she was necessarily baptised before him.

⁵⁵ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 58 (*supra.*, p. 376).

⁵⁶ *HE* IV.23. Bede also notes that one Tatfrith had been elected bishop prior to Bosel, but had not been consecrated due to his untimely death.

that the Hwicce were certainly Christian by the 670s, but there is no earlier evidence of how they came to their Christianity.⁵⁷

Bede's only explicit reference to Christianity amongst the people beyond the Severn is the mention of bishop Walchstod in his summary of the state of Britain c.731.⁵⁸ They appear in Bede's account as already Christian. The late eleventh-century *Life of St Mildburg* recounts a legend of the conversion of Merewalh (here called *rex Merciorum*) about 660 by a Northumbrian priest called Eadfrith, and his subsequent construction of a church dedicated to St Peter at Leominster.⁵⁹ This account is by no means implausible; Northumbrian and Irish/Columban missionaries were active in Mercia and the Midlands in the mid-seventh century. However, Bede's failure to mention Eadfrith weakens the case; though he may not have had access to much information about the region, he was otherwise quite ready to talk of the efforts of the Northumbrian and Irish clerics. In any event, the presumption that the *Magonsætan* were pagan until the mid-seventh century is at odds with the absence of any pagan burial evidence. The only other mention of conversion of these peoples is Bede's reference to the missions amongst the Mercians which began two years before Penda's death in 655.⁶⁰

It appears, therefore, that there is a gap of some fifty to one hundred years between when the Anglo-Saxon burial practice was abandoned in the West Midlands and when it can be reasonably supposed that Northumbrian and Irish missionaries would have first made their appearance in the West Midlands. The possibility emerges that the pagan newcomers changed their burial customs due to the influence of their British neighbours. And if the Britons were Christian, as was probably the case, then this change in burial custom may have been due to the adoption of Christianity.

⁵⁷ The proem of Osric's foundation charter for the monastery of Bath (S51/BCS43, pp. 218-23, of c.675), suggests that paganism had only recently been abandoned: 'When ... all foolish figments of idols had been razed to the ground, then for the first time, for the increase of the catholic and orthodox faith ... we proposed to establish [monasteries]'. While the charter itself probably has an authentic basis, it appears to contain substantial additions, and the proem in particular may be a later archivist's interpolated denunciation of Roman rather than Anglo-Saxon paganism, as would have been conspicuous at the baths complex. See also Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 56-7.

⁵⁸ *HE* V.23.

⁵⁹ See Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 55. J. Hillaby, 'The early church in Herefordshire: Columban and Roman', in Malpas et al, *The Early Church in Herefordshire*, pp. 41-47, draws attention to other evidence, including the late Anglo-Saxon Leominster Prayer Book (split into *British Library Cotton MSS. Nero Aii, ff3-13* and *Galba Axiv*), which shows that a St Eadfrith was commemorated there.

⁶⁰ *HE* III.21.

Steven Bassett has been a spirited advocate of this hypothesis.⁶¹ Patrick Sims-Williams has been more careful in his analysis but still concludes that the most attractive hypothesis is that the Hwicce and *Magonsætan* were converted, 'in an unobtrusive and ultimately unmemorable way by the Britons among them'.⁶² The fact that this hypothesis is based on an absence of evidence means that it must be treated with caution.⁶³ And it presumes an actively Christian British population, for which there is little physical evidence.⁶⁴ But if it is at all valid, the implications are significant. The evidence for Anglo-British ecclesiastical interaction at an institutional level indicates a *lack* of cooperation.⁶⁵ Yet the sharing of beliefs and customs at a *local* level may still have occurred regardless of the nature of political control in the region.⁶⁶ This would suggest a willingness on the part of the West Midland Angles to absorb an aspect of British, that is *welhisce*, culture, something for which there is otherwise a dearth of evidence.

The Survival of British Christian Influence

If the Angles of the West Midlands did indeed learn their Christianity from the Britons amongst them, even if only occasionally, what then survived of this British Christian influence? Northumbrian and Irish missionaries found their way into Mercia in the 650s, eventually establishing monasteries and bishoprics, and would almost certainly

⁶¹ Bassett writes with a certainty that is far beyond the limits of his evidence. For example (with emphases added): '[the change in burial practice] *must* reflect the Anglo-Saxons' coming into contact with organised Christianity. Although we cannot gauge the speed of their conversion, *we need not doubt* its occurrence or its lasting effect on them. It was happening well before the arrival of the Augustinian mission ... Their sixth-century contact with Christianity can, therefore, *only have been through* the British church' (Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', pp. 16-17).

⁶² Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 78-9. He elsewhere states quite explicitly that he offers a 'hypothesis – and that is all that it is' (p. 83). M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past – Place-names and the History of England* (London, 1978), p. 159, similarly observes that the 'Welsh Christian' element amongst the population of the Hwicce may have been sufficient to cause the abandonment of paganism.

⁶³ As Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 15, himself states: 'we should not make simplistic assumptions predicated on an absence of evidence'.

⁶⁴ It would be tempting to see the meeting of the British bishops with Augustine of Canterbury on the border between the Hwicce and West Saxons as evidence that British bishops were active in that region, possibly ministering to converted Anglo-Saxons (*HE* II.2). The alternative possibility, though slim, should also be allowed that the Roman party from Canterbury remained in the area long enough to have an effect on any pagan Anglo-Saxons whom they encountered. Bede's silence here is, however, rather loud.

⁶⁵ *Infra.*, pp. 452-66.

⁶⁶ John Blair (pers. comm., 8 November, 2001). Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 117-22, notes that pockets of British Christianity may have survived at a *local* level farther east, centred around saints' shrines such as to Sixtus and Alban, and done so without the survival of any British ecclesiastical structure. Such an observation may have relevance in the West Midlands.

have ventured farther west into those sub-kingdoms under Mercian hegemony.⁶⁷ By c.680, bishoprics had been created in the West Midlands by Archbishop Theodore which were eventually centred on Worcester and Hereford.⁶⁸ This would probably have meant the suppression of any non-orthodox British customs that were practised amongst the constituents of these dioceses, especially given Theodore's hard-line tendencies. Yet it has been argued that this new Anglo-Saxon church could still have assimilated and been influenced by any British parochial organisation that had existed in the West Midlands.⁶⁹

Before considering the extent to which this new Anglo-Saxon church accommodated what it found of British Christianity already in place, it is necessary to indicate the geographical area for which continuity from sub-Roman British to Anglo-Saxon Christianity in the pre-Viking period could reasonably be argued. The march separating British and Anglian control in the West Midlands was not necessarily a static thing; as a result it is uncertain just how far west the Anglo-Saxon diocesan boundaries would have reached in the pre-Viking period.⁷⁰ An area which certainly must be excluded from the current analysis is the Ergyng/Archenfield region of Herefordshire, which was not finally taken from British control until the eleventh century.⁷¹ Other areas close to Offa's Dyke and west of the Wye might also be too marginal to say for certain whether they came under Anglo-Saxon church jurisdiction in the pre-Viking period. While these areas are potentially instructive regarding ecclesiastical interaction in the late Anglo-Saxon period, the survival of British Christian sites there cannot tell of continuity to Anglo-Saxon Christianity in earlier centuries.

⁶⁷ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 86-7, 94-7. Northumbrian influence can be seen in the kingdom of the Hwicce. Bishop Offor had studied at Whitby, and his predecessor Bosel had been chosen after the death of another candidate Tatfrith who was also from Whitby (*HE* IV.23).

⁶⁸ *Supra.*, pp. 375-6 (note 50), 379. The first bishops of these dioceses included in the relevant episcopal lists (see Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in western England*, p. 88), Bosel and Putta respectively, attest a charter dated to 680, along with Theodore and Æthelred of Mercia (S1167/BCS57).

⁶⁹ See most especially Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', pp. 13-40, and also *idem.*, 'Churches in Worcester', pp. 225-56; *idem.*, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter', pp. 1-28. Blair, 'Churches in the early English landscape', p. 6, and *idem.*, 'The Anglo-Saxon church in Herefordshire', p. 11, also comments on the mixed ecclesiastical culture of Herefordshire and the possible influence of 'Welsh' parochial organisation. He states that in the West Midlands the Anglo-Saxons 'found and assimilated an organised British church' (*idem.*, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', in Blair & Sharpe, *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, p. 265).

⁷⁰ The late medieval diocesan boundaries for Hereford, Worcester and Lichfield are provided by Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 97-100, and Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. xiv-xv, 87-91, 392-4. These cannot be assumed to have been the original bounds, for which there is little certain evidence, especially for the dioceses of Hereford and Lichfield, for which there are few surviving early charters.

⁷¹ D. Parsons, 'Early churches in Herefordshire: documentary and structural evidence', in D. Whitehead (ed.), *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology at Hereford* (Leeds, 1995), p. 60.

Only a limited amount of evidence can be brought to bear for the hypothesis of continuity of British Christian centres. There are no records to show the passing of a church or other Christian site from British to Anglian control in the pre-Viking period. The only possible documentary-based argument for continuity has centred on the allusion to ‘book-clutching monks’ at *Caer Luitcoed* (i.e. *Letocetum*/Wall) in the *Marwnad Cynddylan*.⁷² It has been suggested that this reference means that there were British clergy resident at a church there, and that this church was removed to and succeeded by the Anglo-Saxon church of St Michael’s at nearby Lichfield.⁷³ However, the context of the poem makes it much more likely that, if there were any monks at all, they were instead Northumbrians who had accompanied a Northumbrian army raiding into Mercia.⁷⁴ Thus, the historian has to rely on archaeology, place-name evidence, and topographical evidence.⁷⁵

Archaeological Evidence for British Ecclesiastical Continuity

Archaeological evidence for continuity is compromised by the lack of physical evidence for British Christianity in the West Midland,⁷⁶ by the limited amount of excavation that has been carried out on specific sites,⁷⁷ and, as a consequence, by the general scarcity of evidence for the re-use of Roman monuments.⁷⁸ Some level of interaction in terms of burial custom might be implied by the continuous Roman to Anglo-Saxon usage of the cemeteries of Wasperton and Stretton-on-Fosse (Warwicks.), and the possible overlap

⁷² The *Marwnad Cynddylan* was discussed in Chapter 11 (*supra.*, pp. 387-99).

⁷³ Bassett, ‘Church and diocese in the West Midlands’, p. 34; *idem.*, ‘How the west was won’, p. 113; D.P. Kirby, ‘Welsh bards and the border’, in A. Dornier (ed.), *Mercian Studies* (Leicester, 1977), p. 37. St Michael’s at Lichfield will be discussed below (*infra.*, pp. 448).

⁷⁴ J. Rowland, *Early Welsh Saga Poetry: A Study and Edition of the Englynion* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 133-5; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 29. Rowland states that the relevant line – ‘Book-clutching monks did not protect them’ (line 57) – does not have to mean that monks were even present at *Caer Luitcoed*. Rather, the line could simply be a generalised mocking of their ineffectiveness as spiritual protectors of the hero Cynddylan’s enemies.

⁷⁵ It should be allowed that the passing of British church estates into Anglo-Saxon hands could have occurred in the context of cross-border warfare and land-taking, as is indicated by those estates which were said in the *Llandaff Charters* to have been restored to Llandaff by king Ithael (of Gwent?) after devastation by Æthelbald of Mercia in the eighth century (*supra.*, p. 405). Beyond this, the earliest example of which there is reasonable certainty concerns the church estate of Tidenham (Gloucs.) just east of the Wye. This is listed in two *Llandaff Charters* (where it is referred to as *ecclesia Strat Haffren*) as being in the possession of the bishop of Llandaff until the end of the ninth century (LL 174b, LL 229b). But the same estate was given to St Peter’s Abbey at Bath by King Eadwig as recorded in a charter of 956 (S610/BCS927), with the expected tenant services intact. If this is not just a fabrication of the Llandaff archivist, the estate appears to have been appropriated from the Welsh to the Anglo-Saxon church in the tenth century. See Brook, ‘The early Christian church east and west of Offa’s Dyke’, p. 85; Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, p. 47; *idem.*, *Llandaff Charters*, pp. 108, 122.

⁷⁶ *Supra.*, pp. 432-3.

⁷⁷ Blair, ‘Churches in the early English landscape’, p. 7.

of British and Anglo-Saxon burial phases.⁷⁹ Some significance might also be ascribed to the close proximity of certain Gloucestershire minsters, such as Deerhurst, Frocester and perhaps Woodchester, to former Roman villas,⁸⁰ and of the geographical association of later Anglo-Saxon churches in Herefordshire with probable former Romano-British towns, such as Kenchester, Blackwardine and Leintwardine.⁸¹ But 'locational continuity' does not necessarily reflect continuous usage,⁸² and in these cases there is not any evidence that an earlier ecclesiastical structure lay beneath the later church, and therefore no demonstrated institutional connection.⁸³

A potentially stronger archaeological case for institutional continuity has been made on the basis of later Anglo-Saxon churches which have been found to possess curvilinear churchyards. First pointed out by Charles Thomas,⁸⁴ much has been made of the presumed antiquity and 'Celtic' (or indeed British) character of curvilinear enclosures.⁸⁵ On the assumption that such enclosures might signify early British Christian sites, their identification coincident with Anglo-Saxon churches in the West Midlands has been taken as evidence for continuity. Curvilinear churchyards are found throughout the West Midlands, most frequently in Shropshire but also in Cheshire and in Herefordshire east and north of the Wye.⁸⁶ In Cheshire, they tend to be distributed to the west of the county and especially in the Wirral, which might be indicative of a British origin.⁸⁷ In the South-West Midlands, several examples can be found immediately to the east of

⁷⁸ H. Williams, 'Ancient landscapes and the dead: the re-use of prehistoric and Roman monuments as early Anglo-Saxon burial sites', *Medieval Archaeology* 41 (1997), p. 19.

⁷⁹ Williams, 'Ancient landscapes and the dead', p. 19.

⁸⁰ S. Pearce, 'Estates and church sites in Dorset and Gloucestershire: the emergence of a Christian society', in *idem.* (ed.), *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 117, 130-1.

⁸¹ Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', pp. 103, 115. The later church at Leintwardine stands *within* the walls of a former Roman settlement. The church at Stretton Grandison (*Epocessa*) is another possible example.

⁸² *Supra.*, pp. 296-7.

⁸³ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', p. 241, suggests that, as the walls of villas would have decayed more quickly than (say) forts, their usage as church sites must have been early. But he also states that the practice of re-using Roman buildings was too generalised for us to be able to diagnose British versus Anglo-Saxon origin. Re-use of Roman structures could simply be fortuitous, or even deliberately 'Romanising'.

⁸⁴ For example, C. Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (London, 1971), pp. 50-68.

⁸⁵ For example, Brook, 'The early Christian church east and west of Offa's Dyke', pp. 77-89; Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', p. 56; Hillaby, 'The early church in Herefordshire', p. 48; D. O'Sullivan, 'Curvilinear churchyards in Cumbria', *Bulletin of the Council for British Archaeology, Churches Committee* 13 (1980), pp. 3-5; A. Preston-Jones, 'Decoding Cornish churchyards', in Edwards & Lane, *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, pp. 105-124.

⁸⁶ No systematic study has been done of curvilinear churchyards in Shropshire, though Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 89-90, suggests that sixty possible examples appear on Tithe Award maps. Not all of these are accurately, as opposed to partly, curved enclosures.

Offa's Dyke and the Wye where British control may have lasted longer. A more interesting grouping involves five churchyards in north-east Herefordshire, an upland area where the survival of native British communities within Anglian-controlled territory was more likely.⁸⁸ The greater preponderance of these curved churchyards to the west of Offa's Dyke in British territory supports the contention of a British origin.⁸⁹

It is important, however, to qualify the extent to which the identification of curvilinear churchyards in the Anglian West Midlands can be used to substantiate arguments of continuity. John Blair's work on the topography of Anglo-Saxon minsters has shown that 'there is nothing specifically British or Irish' about curvilinear enclosures; they can be found in Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and at sites where no British ecclesiastical activity need be suspected.⁹⁰ Loosely curvilinear enclosures occur throughout Britain, and on the Continent, as do large enclosures, which appear to be generally monastic.

Distinctively British (or Irish) enclosures, on the other hand, are more likely to be precisely circular and small (i.e. churchyard-sized).⁹¹ Many purported 'transition sites' can thereby be removed from consideration. In addition, many early churchyards and enclosures in indisputably British regions are not curved – Llantwit Major, for example, does not have such an enclosure.⁹² So the feature is not characteristic of all early British sites. It is also uncertain to what extent the curvilinearity of a churchyard is diagnostically early, that is, from the fifth or sixth century, as opposed to the seventh or even ninth century or beyond.⁹³ Curvilinearity may in some cases be a later phase in a sequence of site development. The issue with curvilinearity is that it is not reliable as

⁸⁷ Alan Thacker's study of curvilinear churchyards in Cheshire (cited in Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 88-9) identified eighteen examples, though not all were necessarily accurately curvilinear.

⁸⁸ These are at Stoke Bliss, Pencombe, Mathon, Much Cowarne and Castle Frome. Brook's, 'The early Christian church east and west of Offa's Dyke', pp. 77-89, study of curvilinear churchyards east and west of the southern half of Offa's Dyke, found a total of twelve accurately curved examples in 'English' Herefordshire and southern Shropshire. Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', p. 134, adds Stanford Bishop (Herefords.) to the list.

⁸⁹ Brook, 'The early Christian church east and west of Offa's Dyke', pp. 81-2, identified forty-five examples in the western British side, compared to the twelve on the eastern Anglo-Saxon side.

⁹⁰ Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', pp. 233-5, with examples provided. O'Sullivan 'Curvilinear churchyards in Cumbria', p. 4, makes a similar point regarding Cumbria (*supra.*, pp. 297-8).

⁹¹ John Blair (pers. comm., 15 March, 2002).

⁹² Brook, 'The early Christian church east and west of Offa's Dyke', p. 83. See the appendix to her study (pp. 88-9) for other uncurved churchyards west of Offa's Dyke. Edwards & Lane, 'The archaeology of the early church in Wales', p. 4, and Thomas, *Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain*, p. 32, also note that certain Irish/Columban ecclesiastical enclosures were un-curved, such as Iona.

⁹³ O'Sullivan, 'Curvilinear churchyards in Cumbria', p. 4; Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', pp. 110-11. Brook, 'The early Christian church east and west of Offa's Dyke', p. 79, provides the example of an excavation at one putatively early curvilinear site in Shropshire, Abdon, which revealed that the curvilinear church boundary actually *overlay* a thirteenth-century house site. This is not to mention the re-use of Iron Age enclosures for early medieval burial.

the sole indicator of the antiquity of a churchyard; other evidence is required to substantiate the date of any particular enclosure.⁹⁴ Thus, while the identification of a small, precisely-curved enclosure surrounding an Anglo-Saxon church is potentially indicative of continuity from an earlier British tradition of Christianity, excavation would need to be carried out to determine its date and whether the site enjoyed continuous as opposed to discontinuous or interrupted usage.

In order to demonstrate continuity from Romano-British or British to Anglo-Saxon Christianity at a specific site, as a 'necessary condition' excavated phases need to be identified which can reasonably show continuous usage.⁹⁵ Excavations of burials at some Anglo-Saxon minsters have been considered suggestive of earlier phases of use. At Deerhurst (Gloucs.), some early burials were identified on the basis of their disruption by the foundations of the first stone church, but it was not determined precisely what chronological sequence at the site they were related to, and so whether they could have been British.⁹⁶ Burials discovered on the site of the church of St Guthlac in Hereford had been used to argue for an early date for two associated and apparently religious buildings; however, radiocarbon dating of one of the burials revealed a chronological range that extended into the eighth century, well after the period of Anglo-Saxon conversion.⁹⁷ Two burials found under St Peter's Cathedral refectory at Worcester had been regarded as sub-Roman and therefore British, and the presence of fragments of gold thread around the neck of one, possibly part of a stole or hood, had led to the interpretation that this was a priest.⁹⁸ However, a reassessment of bone fragments from one of the burials has extended the chronological range to the eighth century and thus means that the burials can no longer be safely identified as

⁹⁴ Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', p. 56.

⁹⁵ Blair, 'Churches in the early English landscape', p. 7.

⁹⁶ See Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 59-60, and the references cited therein. An oriented rectangle of charcoal, radiocarbon dated to approximately the seventh century, was discovered at the site though the burials were not clearly linked to this. Sims-Williams (p. 81) also mentions the possibility of a Romano-British 'plaster burial' discovered under the nave of Lichfield Cathedral.

⁹⁷ Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', p. 134; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 60. The excavation at St Guthlac's church revealed a timber building which dates back to at least the ninth century. See A. Thacker, 'Kings, saints and monasteries in pre-Viking Mercia', *Midland History* 9 (1985), p. 5.

⁹⁸ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 60; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 212, and the references cited therein. Radiocarbon dating of two bone fragments from one of the graves had revealed dates of AD536 (429-643 to one standard deviation) and AD585 (483-687 to one standard deviation).

British.⁹⁹ Indeed, they could quite reasonably belong to the cemetery of the Anglo-Saxon cathedral.

The strongest archaeological evidence for continuous use of an ecclesiastical site concerns the church of St Mary-de-Lode in Gloucester. Excavation at the church has revealed that the Anglo-Saxon chapel, the earliest broadly datable phase of which is associated with the late ninth century, overlaid a timber-framed building containing what are considered to be three sub-Roman graves sealed below a rough mortar floor.¹⁰⁰ This structure in turn was erected over the demolished remains of a large Roman house, and shared its alignment on at least one wall. Though the burials have not been dated, the sub-Roman building has been tentatively identified as a timber mausoleum or church.¹⁰¹ It is possible, therefore, to see a sequence of development at the site supportive of continued usage, and of a hypothesis that St Mary-de-Lode may have been a replacement for an original British church. No other church sites in the West Midlands have been excavated to such an extent; so more places of possible continuity may yet be identified.¹⁰²

Place-name Evidence for British Ecclesiastical Continuity

Beyond the evidence of archaeology, place-names have also been used to examine ecclesiastical continuity in the West Midlands. This has principally concerned the identification of *eccles*-names.¹⁰³ These names are spread throughout the West Midlands, albeit thinly, though they do not particularly show a preponderance towards the west of the region, with no examples being identified in Shropshire.¹⁰⁴ There are three examples to be found in the more easterly counties of Warwickshire and Staffordshire: two Exhalls and one Eccleshall respectively.¹⁰⁵ There may be some significance in the proximity of one of the Warwickshire Exhall-names to Alcester,

⁹⁹ See Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester', nn. 107, 109, and the references cited therein. Recalibrated date ranges for the bone fragments (see note 98) to one standard deviation were AD549-680, and AD602-731/764.

¹⁰⁰ The excavation is reported by Bryant, 'St Mary de Lode, Gloucester', pp. 15-18. Two of the graves were empty and the third contained a headless burial. All were oriented east-west. Two further burials which lay outside the building may have been contemporaneous. There was also an undated phase ('period 5') sometime prior to late ninth century ('period 6').

¹⁰¹ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 27; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 155.

¹⁰² Blair, 'Churches in the early English landscape', p. 7.

¹⁰³ *Supra.*, pp. 299-300.

¹⁰⁴ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁵ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 58, 62. Exhall is in fact a shortening of Eccleshall, with the second element, OE *halh*, meaning a 'slight hollow'. For what it is worth, Gelling notes that Eccleshall (Staffs.) was at the centre of a large composite estate described in *Domesday Book*.

presumably a former Roman fort.¹⁰⁶ In Cheshire, there is one example, Eccleston, and its nearness to Chester could suggest a relationship with the population of the Romano-British town.¹⁰⁷ Herefordshire contains three *eccles*-names: Eccleswall, Eccles Green and Eggleton.¹⁰⁸ Eccleswall is immediately south of Weston-under-Penyard (*Ariconium*) and so, like the Exhall near Alcester, could indicate a semi-rural Christian community which either moved or was distinct from the town.¹⁰⁹ Eggleton lies just to the north of a possible Roman settlement at Stretton Grandison (*Epocessa*). Eccles Green in Norton Canon, on the other hand, is some seven kilometres from the nearest Roman town, Kenchester, and so a link is possible but less clear in this particular case.¹¹⁰ Moreover, its location is too close to Offa's Dyke for much to be made of its pre-Viking-period significance. Of the Herefordshire examples, only Eccleswall is known to have emerged as a specific ecclesiastical site, though without a curvilinear enclosure.¹¹¹

The survival of the *eccles*-names suggests the presence of Christianity; these names make sense only if the majority of settlements around them were not Christian, thus rendering *eccles* a suitable identifier.¹¹² The giving of an *eccles*-name could have occurred prior to the Anglo-Saxon arrival, and so the importance of the names in the early Anglo-Saxon period in the West Midlands is not clear. And there are only seven such names to be found in the region, which implies that *eccles* did not in any event persist as a common place-name element. However, the survival of the names suggests that sufficient Britons remained to pass them on, or even to be identified as Christians.¹¹³

Other place-name evidence for continuity has centred on Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical sites in the West Midlands that bear names of British origin. The assumption behind this line of evidence is that the survival of such a name may indicate the continuing ecclesiastical significance of the site. A commonly-cited example is the monastery of

¹⁰⁶ OE *caester*, from Latin *castrum*, was used to denote a fort or walled town. See Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, p. 152; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁷ For example, Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', p. 51; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 66. The parish of Eccleston also boasts a curvilinear enclosure.

¹⁰⁸ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁹ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 80.

¹¹⁰ Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', p. 115.

¹¹¹ Brook, 'The early Christian church east and west of Offa's Dyke', p. 83.

¹¹² Quensel-von Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', p. 95.

¹¹³ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 80.

Wenlock in Shropshire.¹¹⁴ The foundation of the monastery is traditionally attributed to St Mildburg, the daughter of Merewalh, and dated to the last quarter of the seventh century, within the period of Anglo-Saxon rulership.¹¹⁵ However, the name is usually thought to be derived from Welsh *gwyn-llog* 'white monastery',¹¹⁶ and so it is speculated that the monastery continued a late-Roman or sub-Roman British foundation.¹¹⁷ Some support for this contention had come from the apparent identification of a Roman building underneath the post-Conquest church,¹¹⁸ but this interpretation is now discounted.¹¹⁹ There is no physical evidence, therefore, for a pre-Anglo-Saxon church or monastery at the site. The etymology of the name is also not necessarily indicative of a pre-Anglo-Saxon foundation: the whiteness referred to in the first element could be a British area-name deriving from the limestone of nearby Wenlock Edge, as distinct from a specific location name, and the second element may derive from OE *loca* 'enclosed place'.¹²⁰ Alternatively, the reference to white might come from the plaster which appears to have been used as render on one wall of a building.¹²¹ Thus, while the name Wenlock might contain a British element, and thus suggests a bilingual local population, it does not necessarily reveal the existence of an early British monastery.

Leominster is also accorded a Welsh name, *Llanllieni*, in this case in the late eleventh-century *Life of St David* by Rhygyfarch, in which it was claimed that the saint founded a monastery there.¹²² Certainly, Leominster came to have a close association with central

¹¹⁴ For example, Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', pp. 17-18; Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 178.

¹¹⁵ *Supra.*, p. 401.

¹¹⁶ The monastery is referred to as *Wininicas* in 'St Mildburg's Testament' (*supra.*, pp. 379-80), and as *Wenlocan*, *Wynlocan* in the eleventh-century Old English list of saints' resting places. See D.W. Rollason, 'Lists of saints' resting-places in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 7 (1978), p. 89.

¹¹⁷ For example, Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 81. Parallels can also be made with Whithorn, 'the White House', a sub-Roman British foundation.

¹¹⁸ H. Woods, 'Excavations at Wenlock Priory, 1981-6', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 140 (1987), pp. 36-76.

¹¹⁹ M. Biddle & B. Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The so-called Roman building at Much Wenlock', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 141 (1988), pp. 179-83. Radiocarbon dating of charcoal and animal bone fragments revealed dates, the earliest of which (AD660-785) is consistent with the Anglo-Saxon foundation tradition. The character of the building remains also reveal nothing to suggest a Roman rather than an Anglo-Saxon date.

¹²⁰ M. Gelling, 'The early history of western Mercia', in Bassett, *Origins*, pp. 192-3. OE *loca* is a borrowing from Latin *locus*. The Old Welsh word *loc*, from which *llog* is derived, also comes from Latin *locus*, but is accounted 'exceedingly rare' in Wales (only one instance occurs in the *Llandaff Charters*) and Cornwall, and only dates from the eleventh century in the other p-Celtic-speaking region, namely Brittany (here rendered as *lok*).

¹²¹ Biddle & Kjølbye-Biddle, 'The so-called Roman building at Much Wenlock', pp. 180-1.

¹²² Rhygyfarch, *Vita S. Davidis*, ch. 13, (J.W. James, ed., *Rhygyfarch's Life of St. David*, Cardiff, 1967, pp. 8, 33). See also Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 77.

Wales in the post-Conquest period, an area which was served by its fairs, and St David's feast was eventually recorded in the Leominster calendar.¹²³ However, Rhygyfarch's claim is too late, and too partisan, to be given much weight, and the Welsh name could quite easily be a rendering of the English one.¹²⁴ If anything, the topography of Leominster with its rectangular enclosure suggests an Irish/Columban association, and its foundation should, as was stated earlier, more probably be ascribed to the period of Northumbrian ecclesiastical influence in the West Midlands in the second half of the seventh century.¹²⁵

There is little other evidence concerning early British ecclesiastical place-names or even dedications in the Anglian West Midlands. No systematic study has been conducted of Celtic and non-Celtic church dedication in the West Midlands, as has been done, for example, by Nicholas Orme for Devon and Cornwall or W.N. Yates for Wales.¹²⁶ This deficit has no doubt occurred due to the lack of early evidence, especially charters, for much of the region. Potentially early British-mediated dedications to saints such as Lawrence in Herefordshire,¹²⁷ and Helen and Alban in Worcester,¹²⁸ have been suggested, though in no instance is the dedication recorded in a pre-Conquest source. The proximity of two of the St Lawrence dedications, at Weston-under-Penyard and Stretton Grandison, to places with *eccles*-names and to former Roman settlements may be of some note. These could indicate British Christian community linkages in the area and Britons continued ability to venerate ancient saints; alternatively, they could be no more than coincidence.

¹²³ Hillaby, 'The early church in Herefordshire', pp. 47-8.

¹²⁴ Rhygyfarch, *Vita S. Davidis*, ch. 13, in fact attributes a biblical twelve monastic foundations to the saint, including Bath, Crowland and Repton, as well as other sites in Wales.

¹²⁵ Hillaby, 'The early church in Herefordshire', pp. 48-50. As implied above (see note 92, *supra.*, p. 441), Iona's *vallum* appears to have been rectangular. Also note the claim in the *Life of St. Mildburg* about the Northumbrian priest Eadfrith, who was granted a church dedicated to St Peter at Leominster (*supra.*, p. 436).

¹²⁶ N. Orme, *English Church Dedications: With a Survey of Cornwall and Devon* (Exeter, 1996); W.N. Yates, 'The distribution and proportion of Celtic and non-Celtic church dedications in Wales', *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales* 28 (1973), pp. 5-17. Yates's study will be discussed presently (*infra.*, pp. 465-6).

¹²⁷ Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', pp. 115-16. On the Continent, dedications to St Lawrence are found in several early church contexts. There are five parish churches in Herefordshire with such a dedication: Weston-under-Penyard, Stretton Grandison, Bishopstone, Canon Pyon and Preston-on-Wye.

¹²⁸ See Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester', pp. 245-6, and the references cited therein. The St Alban dedication is suggested as pre-Anglo-Saxon solely on the basis of the saint having been a Romano-British martyr. The dedication to him could be much later. Helen (Helena) was the mother of the Emperor Constantine, and thus may have been an early cult figure. However, it is far from clear whether her cult was venerated in the fourth, fifth or even sixth century on the Continent, and there are no other known dedications to her for any seventh- or eighth-century English churches.

The evidence thus far canvassed reveals that there are only limited, circumstantial grounds for supposing that the Anglo-Saxon church assimilated or accommodated any specific British ecclesiastical site in the West Midlands. At only one site, St Mary-de-Lode in Gloucester, can it be said with any assurance that occupation and usage continued from Roman, to sub-Roman British, to Anglo-Saxon periods, and even here there may have been gaps. As a result, recourse will now be made to topographical evidence to try to determine what the Anglo-Saxon church retained of what it found in place in the West Midlands.

Topographical Evidence for British Ecclesiastical Continuity

Topographical evidence may be employed to investigate the extent and layout of the parishes served by Anglo-Saxon minster churches, and potentially the antiquity of the land-units of which they were formed. Analysis of the topography of the early Anglo-Saxon church in the West Midlands has been carried out principally by Steven Bassett, who has argued that several of the Anglo-Saxon minsters in the region absorbed extant dioceses and estates which were of British origin. In specific studies, Bassett has mounted a case for a British origin to the churches and dioceses of St Helen's at Worcester, St Andrew's at Wroxeter, St Mary-de-Lode at Gloucester and St Michael's at Lichfield.¹²⁹ It is not intended to examine all of Bassett's arguments, but merely to emphasise some points of qualification.

The archaeological evidence at St Mary-de-Lode at Gloucester comprises the excavation of successive stages of use at the site;¹³⁰ this implies the continued recognition of a known ecclesiastical locus or a sacred place of some variety, though it cannot prove institutional continuity. St Mary-de-Lode is not heard of before the twelfth century, where it appears as a possession and parish church of St Peter's Cathedral in Gloucester;¹³¹ thus, there is no written evidence that can expressly attest to the nature of its diocese (or even its institutional existence) in the Anglo-Saxon period. Topographical evidence employed by Bassett to attempt to strengthen the case for a British origin for St Mary-de-Lode concerns its location at a distance from, and outside

¹²⁹ Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester', pp. 225-56; *idem.*, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter', pp. 1-28; *idem.*, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', pp. 13-40

¹³⁰ *Supra.*, p. 443.

¹³¹ As stated in *Gloucester Cathedral Register A*, no. 4, in W.H. Hart (ed.), *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae* (London, 1863), vol. I, p. lxxvii. The foundation of St Peter's is usually dated to c.679x681 on the basis of a late-surviving charter of Æthelred of Mercia, in which Osric

the precinct of, St Peter's.¹³² This is unusual for a subordinate church, and so Bassett argues that St Mary-de-Lode was already in existence when St Peter's was founded, with the latter being deliberately located at a distance from the former to avoid any association between Roman and British institutions. This is possible, but the siting of St Peter's may indeed have been more to do with choosing a 'Romanising' location within the walls of the former Roman town.¹³³ The topographical evidence does not reveal anything concerning the 'handing over' of a British institution or the assimilation of any pre-existing diocesan structures.

St Michael's at Lichfield is said by Bassett to have been in existence during the Anglo-Saxon period and, by virtue of the size of its parish, to have been founded prior to the better-documented church of Lichfield (St Chad) which was not as extensive.¹³⁴ Bassett claims, therefore, that St Michael's had primacy over St Chad's because its existence was already well-established, and that for this to be the case it must have been a carry-over of a British episcopal see originally centred on *Letocetum*.¹³⁵ However, there is no pre-Conquest reference to St Michael's or its parish boundaries (the earliest outline of which is in *Domesday Book*), nor any archaeological evidence which even suggests its presence in the Anglo-Saxon period.¹³⁶ Thus, the argument for a British origin for St Michael's relies on the presumption that a parochial organisation which was supposedly established in the fourth or fifth century – and in an area for which there is little clear evidence of an early Christian presence – continued and was absorbed into the Anglo-Saxon system to be eventually recorded for the first time some five centuries later.

Similar reservations can be raised regarding St Helen's at Worcester and St Andrew's at Wroxeter. St Helen's is said by Bassett to have been an extensive diocese of British origin, and perhaps even the seat of a British bishop, founded well before the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon see by Archbishop Theodore, c.680, and the

of the Hwicce was said to have bought land for the foundation of a minster at Gloucester (S70/BCS60). See H.P.R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands* (Leicester, 1972), pp. 31, 153–66.

¹³² Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', pp. 26–9.

¹³³ The contrary hypothesis that St Mary-de-Lode was founded at the site by the Anglo-Saxon church after a period of disuse, and that St Peter's location had nothing to do with any former British ecclesiastical community, is also consistent with the available evidence.

¹³⁴ *HE* IV.3; *VW* 15. Chad became bishop of the Mercians and established his episcopal seat at Lichfield c.667. The church is located at Stowe in Lichfield, a place-name of Anglo-Saxon origin, and may have originally been the house which Chad built near the cathedral as a place of retirement and prayer.

¹³⁵ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', pp. 29–35.

¹³⁶ A point which Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 33, himself concedes, and which distinguishes St Michael's from the case of St Mary-de-Lode in Gloucester.

cathedral to St Peter.¹³⁷ However, the argument is again based on post-Conquest evidence, in this case from the cartulary of the Worcester Cathedral priory concerning St Helen's estates and boundaries as they were described in the early twelfth century.¹³⁸ St Helen's thus remains undocumented during the Anglo-Saxon period. Admittedly, the choice of Worcester as the location of the see of the Hwicce, as opposed to Gloucester or even Winchcombe, might suggest that it had some pre-existing standing as a Christian centre in the West Midlands.¹³⁹ On the other hand, the location of the see might have had more to do with Worcester's surviving Roman fortifications and its situation on a bluff overlooking the Severn and near a crossing point, than with any pre-existing British parochial organisation centred on the town.¹⁴⁰ None of the evidence used by Bassett to prove his argument precludes the possibility that St Helen's was of early Anglo-Saxon origin.¹⁴¹

The case which Bassett makes for a British origin for St Andrew's at Wroxeter rests on an otherwise unexplained deviation in the boundary between the dioceses of Hereford and Lichfield.¹⁴² In the main, the boundary follows the course of the Severn, with Hereford to the south and Lichfield to the north. However, the boundary takes a southern detour away from the river for several miles on either side of Wroxeter.¹⁴³ Bassett's argument is that this territory was once the southern part of an extant British diocese centred on Roman Wroxeter (*Viriconium*) which survived to be eventually

¹³⁷ Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester', pp. 225-56, esp. pp. 238-44. His argument is based on the premise that land to the east of the River Teme – namely, the royal manor of Martley and its township Doddenham – which were part of the parish of St Helen's, could only have been gained by the church before the Anglo-Saxon see and cathedral were established. This portion under the ministry of St Helen's upsets an otherwise coherent geographical core of land – the bishop of Worcester's triple hundred of Oswaldslow – which was bounded by rivers and streams on its north, south and eastern boundaries. Bassett states that this evidence shows 'beyond all reasonable doubt' that St Helen's was a British church ('Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 24).

¹³⁸ As cited by Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester', pp. 225-56. There is evidence in the cartulary of a late eleventh-century dispute between the Worcester churches of St Helen and St Alban, in which it was claimed that St Helen's was considered to have been the parish church of the cathedral of St Peter from the earliest days of Archbishop Theodore and King Æthelred of Mercia. This document is not of undoubted authenticity: it contains a number of anachronisms, and may have been fabricated in the twelfth century by the monks of the cathedral, which Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester', pp. 252-3 n. 78, acknowledges. Bassett (p. 237) also states that it is 'patently absurd' to suggest that St Helen's had been founded in the late seventh century to act in such a capacity but provides no reasons for this assertion.

¹³⁹ As Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester', p. 232, suggests.

¹⁴⁰ J. Barrow, 'Worcester', in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of ASE*, p. 488. The name of Worcester derives from OE *Weogorna-caester*, 'Roman walled town (or fort) of the people called *Weogora*'. See Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester', p. 243.

¹⁴¹ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 39.

¹⁴² Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', pp. 35-9; *idem.*, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter', pp. 13-17.

incorporated into the diocese of Lichfield in the seventh century.¹⁴⁴ There is clear evidence for sub-Roman occupation at Wroxeter,¹⁴⁵ and if it is accepted that there were Christians amongst its population, then a continuing Christian presence, perhaps with priests or even a bishop, might be expected. But, as stated earlier, there is nothing of a specifically Christian nature which has been found at the site and which can affirm the existence of a Roman or sub-Roman church.¹⁴⁶ St Andrew's itself, along with the other churches considered by Bassett, is not mentioned during the Anglo-Saxon period, with *Domesday Book* providing the earliest record.¹⁴⁷ The diocesan boundary between Hereford and Lichfield was not recorded until c.1291, at which time other deviations from the Severn were also apparent, though none as marked as the one under discussion.¹⁴⁸ To argue for the survival of a British diocese centred on Wroxeter, with St Andrew's as its church, therefore relies on a generous interpretation of the topographical evidence,¹⁴⁹ and does not sit well with the establishment of Shrewsbury as the Anglo-Saxon political centre in the region.¹⁵⁰ It is equally, or even more, likely that the region around Wroxeter represented the political territory of the *Wreocensætan*, which had originally been included within the diocese of Lichfield and then not given up when the diocese of Hereford was carved off some years later.¹⁵¹ There is no need to accept that this was an earlier British ecclesiastical unit. It is quite possible that newcomers themselves recognised the topographical unity of the Wroxeter hinterland and did not wish to see it divided.

¹⁴³ This southern bulge incorporates a large block of geographically-discrete land which was once subject to the churches of Conover and Cound. See Figure 4 in Bassett, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter', p. 15.

¹⁴⁴ The northern half of this putative diocese would, Bassett, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter', pp. 14-16, claims, have encompassed the parishes of Wrockwardine and Ercall.

¹⁴⁵ *Supra.*, pp. 386, 424-5.

¹⁴⁶ *Supra.*, pp. 430, 433.

¹⁴⁷ Bassett, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter', pp. 2, 17-19. There has not been a detailed excavation of the St Andrew's site. The present structure is located in the south-western corner of the Roman town, near a river crossing, and appears to incorporate an Anglo-Saxon wall in its first nave. The church is aligned according to an old Roman road running beside the church. While interesting, this latter observation in no way indicates that the earliest structure at the site was Roman or sub-Roman; as has been shown, the Anglo-Saxon church hierarchy was quite willing to use Roman remains and to make its own deductions on the basis of the physical evidence which it encountered; see Blair, 'Anglo-Saxon minsters: a topographical review', p. 242.

¹⁴⁸ Bassett, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter', p. 14; Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 97-9; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 43-4.

¹⁴⁹ Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 39; *idem.*, 'Medieval ecclesiastical organisation in the vicinity of Wroxeter', p. 24, says as much: 'It must be admitted that even when all the available evidence is taken together, it is insufficient to prove that Wroxeter was an earlier, British church absorbed into the Anglo-Saxon minster system ... there exists the possibility that it was newly founded in the seventh century'.

¹⁵⁰ Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 174.

The topographical evidence for the incorporation of British church and diocesan structures into the early Anglo-Saxon church of the West Midlands provides no panacea for the dearth of other evidence for continuity from British to Anglo-Saxon Christianity. The hypothesis that the new Anglo-Saxon church preserved what it found of British Christianity already in place is attractive. Yet it has been hard to demonstrate where this may have occurred. The church of St Mary-de-Lode in Gloucester remains a candidate, and the places with *eccles*-names suggest the continuation of Christian British communities in parts of the region. There has been some suggestion that the relatively small number of early Anglo-Saxon minsters known about in northern Herefordshire is a consequence of the survival of a more decentralised British church system which retarded the formation of the Anglo-Saxon.¹⁵² However, the minster system in Herefordshire may have been more extensive, and indeed evidence regarding other West Midland counties reveals a landscape of early minsters.¹⁵³ It does not seem that any British ecclesiastical structures or institutions in the West Midlands survived in sufficient numbers to make a substantial contribution to the parochial organisation of the Anglo-Saxon church.¹⁵⁴ British Christians in the West Midlands may have effected the conversion of the pagan newcomers at a local level, but any residual influence appears to have been swamped after c.655 by the Irish/Columban and Roman ecclesiastical structures introduced into the region.¹⁵⁵

Institutional Interaction between the Anglo-Saxon Church and the Church of the Britons of Wales

If it is accepted that the Angles of the West Midlands were exposed to the Christianity of their British neighbours, and so converted at a date earlier than that which might be supposed for any Irish/Columban or Roman missions, the question of ecclesiastical influence from, and interaction with, the heartland of Wales must also be considered.

¹⁵¹ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 44.

¹⁵² Blair, 'The Anglo-Saxon church in Herefordshire', pp. 5, 11, states that Leominster, Acton Beauchamp and Bromyard are the only pre-850 examples known about.

¹⁵³ Parsons, 'Early churches in Herefordshire', pp. 60-62, and Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', p. 128, show that there may have been as many as thirty-five Anglo-Saxon minsters in Herefordshire. To be fair, Blair's comments regarding British influence in Herefordshire were also intended to encompass that part of the county west and south of the Wye, i.e. Ergyng/Archenfield, where influence is not doubted. See also Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 35, *idem.*, 'How the west was won', p. 116, regarding the minster system in Shropshire, and Blair, 'The Anglo-Saxon church in Herefordshire', p. 5, regarding Worcestershire.

¹⁵⁴ Gelling, *West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁵ John Blair (pers. comm., 8 November, 2001); Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 178.

The existence of British Christians in the West Midlands in the sub-Roman period, irrespective of their level of parochial organisation, means that there could have been contact with the organised British church farther west in Wales itself.¹⁵⁶ If the Britons of the West Midlands were willing to share their religion with the Anglo-Saxon newcomers, it could be asked whether this ‘evangelisation’ was at all sanctioned by a British church hierarchy or even assisted by clergy from religious houses within the identified British kingdoms.¹⁵⁷ It may also be asked whether the British alliances of Penda led to some ecclesiastical discourse between Mercia and Wales? As far as the surviving evidence reveals, however, this does not appear to have occurred. The impression to be gained, rather, is one of failed contacts and even hostility at an institutional level between the British church of Wales and the Anglo-Saxons, whether living in the West Midlands or elsewhere, that lasted for much of the pre-Viking period. This section will explore the evidence for institutional interaction between the Anglo-Saxon church and the church of the Britons of Wales.

The Augustine’s Oak Conferences

The series of events which sets the scene for the impression of discord concerns Augustine of Canterbury’s two meetings, c.602-4, with the British bishops at ‘Augustine’s Oak’ on the border of the West Saxons and the Hwicce.¹⁵⁸ The Augustine’s Oak conferences are the first of Bede’s ecclesiastical ‘set pieces’ which marshal Roman orthodoxy against British and Irish/Columban practice.¹⁵⁹ Bede is the only source for these meetings, and because of his distance both in time and in location from the events, some historians have regarded Augustine’s Oak as an ‘ecclesiastical saga’ of uncertain authenticity.¹⁶⁰ More recently, however, there has been respect for

¹⁵⁶ It must be kept in mind, however, that the distribution of Christian memorial stones – notwithstanding the ‘Cunorix stone’ at Wroxeter – did not extend into the West Midlands. So the extent of ecclesiastical interaction and influence from the British west must not have been very strong. See Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 77, and *supra.*, pp. 431-2.

¹⁵⁷ This is implied, for example, by Bassett, ‘Church and diocese in the West Midlands’, p. 39, and stated outright by R. Meens, ‘A background to Augustine’s mission to Anglo-Saxon England’, *ASE* 23 (1994), pp. 16-17.

¹⁵⁸ This is reported in *HE* II.2. I have varied Colgrave and Mynors’ translation in some of the subsequent quotes to give a more literal meaning. The dates of c.602-4 for the meetings are suggested by Stancliffe, ‘The British church and the mission of Augustine’, p. 124, on the basis that they probably occurred fairly close in time after the arrival of Pope Gregory’s letters in 601 (*HE* I.27, I.29, I.31).

¹⁵⁹ The second is the Synod of Whitby in 664 (*supra.*, pp. 323-6).

¹⁶⁰ N.K. Chadwick, ‘The battle of Chester: a study of sources’, in *idem.* (ed.), *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 169. N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1997), p. 104 & n. 73, suggests that Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 9, subscribes to this assessment; however,

the historicity of the *colloquia*;¹⁶¹ while some of the details might be dubious, there are indications that Bede's account was not simply an imaginative reconstruction.

Bede's account of Augustine's encounters with the British bishops can be divided into three sections, the first two of which are of primary interest here.¹⁶² In the first section, Bede tells of Augustine's initial *colloquium* with the 'bishops and scholars of the nearest British province [*episcopos siue doctores proximae Brettonum provinciae*]', summoned with the aid of Æthelberht of Kent, who was the third of Bede's *imperium*-wielding kings.¹⁶³ The *colloquium* was said by Bede to have been convened at a place which 'still today in the language of the English is called *Augustinaes Ác*, that is Augustine's Oak [*usque hodie lingua Anglorum Augustinaes Ác, id est Robur Augustini ... appellatur*]', somewhere along the boundary between the Hwicce and the West Saxons.¹⁶⁴ At this meeting Augustine urged the British delegation to join with him in Catholic unity to preach the faith to the pagan Anglo-Saxons, as well exhorting them to comply with orthodox custom especially regarding the date of Easter. Though the Britons were moved by Augustine's demonstration of righteousness in the healing of a blind Englishman whom they themselves were unable to cure, they refused to abandon their own customs without the consent and approval of their own people. Thus, a second, more extensive, conference was arranged.

In the next section of Bede's account he tells of this second meeting, which presumably occurred at the same location though Bede is not explicit about this. He first recounts that the meeting was 'as they say [*ut perhibent*]' attended by:

Seven British bishops and many most learned men ... chiefly from their most famous monastery which is called in the language of the English

in my view this is an inaccurate reading as Sims-Williams goes on to argue for a credible origin for the story (p. 78).

¹⁶¹ Higham, *Convert Kings*, pp. 106-7; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 78; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 107-51, esp. pp. 131-2.

¹⁶² The segmentation of Bede's account of Augustine's Oak and its sequelae into three sections is proposed by Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 124-5. Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 106, also talks of subsections in Bede's account.

¹⁶³ *HE* II.5.

¹⁶⁴ The specific location of Augustine's Oak is unknown. It has been suggested as part of the aetiology of the place-name Aust (Gloucs.), rendered *aet Austin* in a Worcester charter of the 690s (S77/BCS75). Aust would certainly have been a most suitable location for such a meeting, positioned as it is on the southern, Anglo-Saxon side of the Severn crossing, directly opposite the mouth of the Wye – a possible route of travel for the British bishops. The bishops would not then have had to travel over Anglo-Saxon territory. See also Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 110; H.R. Loyn, 'The conversion of the English to Christianity: some comments on the Celtic contribution', in *idem.*, *Society and Peoples: Studies in the History of England and Wales, c. 600-1200* (London, 1992), p. 30; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 78.

Bancornaburg [i.e. Bangor-is-Coed] [*VII Brettonum episcopi et plures viri doctissimi, maxime de nobilissimo eorum monasterio quod vocatur lingua Anglorum Bancornaburg*]. It is said [*narratur*] to have been ruled over at the time by Abbot Dinoot.

Bede then states that the Britons had in the interim consulted a holy anchorite, who advised them to follow Augustine only if he demonstrated the true humility of a man of God and rose to greet them when they arrived for the meeting. On their entrance, however, Augustine remained seated. Augustine declared that he would allow the Britons most of their unorthodox customs if they agreed to three things: to keep Easter at the correct time, to complete the rite of baptism according to Roman custom, and to join him in preaching to the Anglo-Saxons. The British bishops refused, stating also that they would not accept him as archbishop, for if they did they feared he would cease to respect them. As a consequence, Augustine, 'it is said [*fertur*]', prophesied vengeance against the British clergy. This was visited upon them some years later in the form of the battle of Chester (c.613-616), the event which makes up the third section of Bede's account.¹⁶⁵

There appear to be differences between the sections of Bede's Augustine's Oak narrative which suggest that they do not all derive from the same source.¹⁶⁶ The first section is presented in a straightforward manner from Augustine's point of view, with no suggestion that Bede was using anything other than what he considered to be a credible source. The second section, on the other hand, is described from the Britons' perspective, and contains several indications that Bede received the information from what he regarded to be a less reliable, possibly oral, source. Phrases used in this section – *ut perhibent* ('as they say'), *narratur* ('it is said/related'), and *fertur* ('it is said') – imply that Bede was less sure about what he was writing, and suggests an oral element somewhere in its transmission.¹⁶⁷ A further observation is that the sections also differ in how Augustine and the Britons are presented.¹⁶⁸ In the first section, Bede focuses on Augustine as the 'true herald of the heavenly light [*verus summae lucis praeco*]', as compared to the ineffective Britons who failed to heal the blind man. In the second section, however, Bede includes certain phrases which present the Britons in a rare

¹⁶⁵ *Supra.*, pp. 170-2.

¹⁶⁶ Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 105; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 125.

¹⁶⁷ H. Moisl, 'Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies and Germanic oral tradition', *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), p. 224.

¹⁶⁸ Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 125-6.

favourable light: calling the men from Bangor-is-Coed ‘most learned [*doctissimi*]’, the monastery itself ‘most famous [*nobilissimo*]’, and the British anchorite ‘holy and prudent [*sanctum ac prudentem*]’. The second and third sections also contain details which reveal a British origin: the spelling of the names ‘Dinoot’ and ‘Brocmail’, the inclusion of the British name ‘Carlegion’ for Chester, and information regarding the make-up and workings of the Bangor-is-Coed monastery.¹⁶⁹

It is quite plausible then that the first and the second (and third) sections of Bede’s Augustine’s Oak narrative, or at least significant elements of it, were of a different origin. The first section probably derived from a Canterbury source, perhaps even a document, which came to Bede from his principal Canterbury authority Abbot Albinus.¹⁷⁰ The second section contains elements which almost certainly announce a British source, or British influence in its transmission.¹⁷¹ It is not possible to be entirely confident about the historicity of these events, and Bede’s more qualified presentation of the second section of his account suggests that the first section should be regarded as the more reliable.¹⁷² However, there are indications that Bede was not simply extemporising.¹⁷³ The British names and the information regarding Bangor-is-Coed are arguably credible, as is Bede’s description of the Bangor scholars as *doctores*, a term which matches Gildas’s *magister elegans*.¹⁷⁴ The relatively favourable presentation of the Britons in the second section is also not likely to have been Bede’s invention;

¹⁶⁹ Chadwick, ‘The battle of Chester: a study of sources’, p. 169; Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 105; K.H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), p. 295; Stancliffe, ‘The British church and the mission of Augustine’, pp. 125, 127-8.

¹⁷⁰ *HE* Preface. Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 107, points out that as Augustine and his colleagues came from a literate church culture they may have made some record of the meeting. He does not state why a Canterbury record of the first meeting would have survived but not a record of the second.

¹⁷¹ Stancliffe, ‘The British church and the mission of Augustine’, pp. 126-9, provides a lengthy discussion regarding the transmission of the British-sounding material contained in the second section of Bede’s narrative. To account for the spelling of the personal names, she plumps for a documentary source – written in Latin by a Briton – which she argues may have come to Bede from the monastery of Malmesbury. Malmesbury was located in north-west Wessex near the Hwicce, and so was in the likely vicinity of Augustine’s Oak; this may have led to some local interest in the *colloquia* which resulted in the acquisition of a British account. Malmesbury was also where Pecthelm, who became the first bishop at the formerly British monastery of Whithorn, had been a monk. Stancliffe suggests, therefore, that Pecthelm passed this supposed British document on to Bede, perhaps providing additional oral information. Bede’s use of the qualifying phrases *fertur* and so forth may therefore have been informed by his distrust of a non-orthodox British text. Pecthelm had certainly been a source for some of Bede’s other material (for example, the miracle stories contained in *HE* V.13, V.18), and so this hypothesis is not incredible, though the existence of an otherwise unknown British document is speculative. It is also unclear just how Malmesbury would have obtained such a document. See Sims-Williams, ‘The uses of writing in early medieval Wales’, pp. 20-8, on the level of textuality in early medieval Wales.

¹⁷² Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 107.

¹⁷³ The main points of this argument are put forward by Stancliffe, ‘The British church and the mission of Augustine’, pp. 131-2.

¹⁷⁴ *Supra.*, p. 431.

neither is his statement in the first section that the British bishops preferred to consult more widely amongst their colleagues before committing themselves to a decision. The *Annales Cambriae* record under the year 601 the ‘synod of *Urbs Legionis* [Chester]’,¹⁷⁵ which might be a reference to this wider meeting of the British clergy. The nature of Augustine’s demands of the Britons similarly suggests that Bede was drawing on extant material. On the one hand, there is no mention of the British tonsure, an issue which Bede emphasises at various other points.¹⁷⁶ On the other, Augustine’s requirement that the Britons adopt the Roman rite of baptism is never mentioned again in the *Historia ecclesiastica*. This suggests that Bede was not simply anachronistically applying the issues of his own day to the time of Augustine. There are, therefore, grounds for accepting the historicity of the Augustine’s Oak conferences.

What then can the Augustine’s Oak conferences reveal of ecclesiastical interaction between the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons of Wales? Of most significance is Augustine’s expectation that the British bishops should accept his authority as bishop of Canterbury.¹⁷⁷ Prior to the *colloquia*, Augustine had sent to Rome for direction from Pope Gregory regarding a number of matters, including what his relationship was to be with the bishops of Gaul and Britain. Gregory replied that Augustine was to have no authority over the Gallic bishops, but stated that ‘we commit to you, my brother, all the bishops of Britain [*Brittaniarum ... omnes episcopos*] that the unlearned may be instructed, the weak strengthened by your counsel, and the perverse corrected by your authority’.¹⁷⁸ This sentiment was reinforced in a further letter of 601 in which Gregory similarly stated that Augustine was to have:

Under [his] subjection ... all the bishops of Britain [*omnes Brittaniae sacerdotes*], under the guidance of our Lord God, Jesus Christ: so that they may see from the words and actions of your Holiness what true faith and good living are like.¹⁷⁹

Augustine, therefore, had a clear instruction that all the bishops of Britain were his to command, and when he met the Britons at Augustine’s Oak it appears that he was

¹⁷⁵ AC s.a. Chester is, of course, in the immediate vicinity of Bangor-is-y-Coed.

¹⁷⁶ *Supra.*, pp. 324-5.

¹⁷⁷ This term is certainly anachronistic as applied to Augustine.

¹⁷⁸ HE I.27, ‘*Brittaniarum vero omnes episcopus tuae fraternitati committimus, ut indocti doceantur, infirmi persuasione roborentur, perversi autoritate corrigantur*’.

¹⁷⁹ HE I.29, ‘*omnes Brittaniae sacerdotes habeat Deo Domino nostra Iesu Christo auctore subiectos; quatinus ex lingua et vita tuae sanctitatis at recte credendi, et bene vivendi*’.

acting with full papal support. This would explain Augustine's attitude of superiority over the Britons which was most obvious in the second meeting.

What was the genesis of this less than positive attitude towards the British church?¹⁸⁰

The obvious answer would be the Britons' non-orthodoxy: the fact that they did not yet follow the rule of the Roman church. When Augustine arrived in Canterbury in 597, however, it is not likely that he, or Pope Gregory, knew much about the state of British Christianity.¹⁸¹ Britain was remote from the Mediterranean world, and while there had been trading contact in the fifth century, this had diminished if not ceased by the end of the sixth.¹⁸² Augustine does appear to have encountered British Christians within his missionary sphere, as is revealed by his correspondence with Gregory regarding the local cult of the martyr St Sixtus,¹⁸³ but there is no evidence that he met any British clergy in the south-east. The remoteness of the Augustine's Oak meeting from Canterbury could imply that there were no British clergy closer at hand, though it should be allowed that Augustine's journey far to the west was so that he could meet with authorities of the British Church in territory which was still under their control. It is probable, nevertheless, that Augustine had no direct experience with a British church hierarchy prior to his first meeting at the Oak, and so before this could only report to Pope Gregory of what he found in the south-east, namely, a disorganised British Christianity, barely surviving in pockets of local veneration.¹⁸⁴ In this regard, it is understandable that Gregory would have thought that the British Christians needed leadership.¹⁸⁵ His view of the British Church was, therefore, in part rooted in

¹⁸⁰ Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 123.

¹⁸¹ Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 111-14.

¹⁸² E. Campbell, 'The archaeological evidence for external contacts: imports, trade and economy in Celtic Britain, A.D. 400-800', in K.R. Dark (ed.), *External Contacts and the Economy of Late Roman and Post-Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 83-96.

¹⁸³ Augustine's correspondence with Gregory regarding Sixtus is not reported by Bede; an edition can be found in M. Deanesly & P. Grosjean, 'The Canterbury edition of the answers of Pope Gregory I to St Augustine', *JEH* 10 (1959), pp. 28-9. On the cult of St Sixtus, see also Meens, 'A background to Augustine's mission', p. 5-6.

¹⁸⁴ W.H.C. Frend, 'Ecclesia Britannica: prelude or dead end?', *JEH* 30 (1979), p. 129. Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 122-3, notes that Augustine does not seem to have asked Gregory about the different methods for dating Easter in the questions he sent to him. This may also suggest that he knew little, at the time, about the British church in the west. Meens, 'A background to Augustine's mission', pp. 16-17, argued for a British Christian origin to some of the questions asked of Pope Gregory by Augustine – for example, prohibitions regarding childbirth, menstruation and participation in sexual relations, which Augustine inquired about, can be found in 'Celtic' Penitentials. He thus argued for British missionary activity in south-east Anglo-Saxon England and Kent. This view has been roundly rebuffed by Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 120-1, who sources such questions to literalist views of the Old Testament which were likely to have been promulgated by the Frankish church, and specifically Luidhard, Queen Bertha of Kent's Frankish bishop.

¹⁸⁵ It should also be allowed that in giving Augustine authority over 'all the bishops of Britain [*omnes Britanniae sacerdotes / Britanniarum omnes episcopus*]', Gregory was not solely referring to British Celtic

ignorance. It might also have been more acceptable to Æthelberht of Kent, an *imperium*-wielding king, for Augustine to follow a policy of domination rather than appeasement.¹⁸⁶

That said, Augustine must at some point have learned of the British church in the independent west and sought to make contact: there must have been some formal communication made between Canterbury and the British church in Wales so that a meeting could be arranged at what appears to have been a mutually satisfactory location. An embassy to the Britons no doubt constituted part of the assistance provided to Augustine by Æthelberht, and his aid probably also extended to guaranteeing Augustine's safe passage to the meeting place in the west. There is no reason to assume, however, that Æthelberht held any authority over the Britons which compelled them to attend. The British bishops and scholars were said by Bede to have been called or summoned (*'convocavit'*) by Augustine to the meeting, but this does not mean that they had no choice in the matter.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, the Britons seem to have come and gone as they pleased, and ultimately opposed Augustine. This behaviour is not consistent with their having been under Æthelberht's dominion.

Part of Augustine's motivation for contacting the British church in the west was a desire to extend his own authority and to bring the British clergy within the Catholic fold; this is quite clear from Bede's account. But as Bede also says, Augustine sought assistance from the British bishops in his conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Augustine had previously appealed to Pope Gregory for assistance in his mission, complaining that he did not have the staff to prosecute his task to the full.¹⁸⁸ Gregory responded by sending him a few more clergy in 601, including Mellitus, Iustus, Paulinus and Rufinianus;¹⁸⁹ however these reinforcements do not appear to have been adequate. It is likely, therefore, that on learning of the British church in the west and on receiving instruction from Gregory regarding the nature of his authority over the bishops of Britain,

bishops, as distinct from (say) Anglo-Saxon ones yet to be consecrated by Augustine but who would have dioceses in Britain.

¹⁸⁶ Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 137.

¹⁸⁷ Higham, *Convert Kings*, pp. 107-8, 110. Plummer, *Bede*, vol. II, p. 73, had said on the basis of this passage that Æthelberht's dominion extended over the Britons as well as the Anglo-Saxons, but this is unlikely.

¹⁸⁸ As implied by *MGH Epist.* II, no. XI.39, pp. 311-13. See Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 123.

¹⁸⁹ *HE* I.29.

Augustine fixed on the notion of enlisting the British church to his cause.¹⁹⁰ This indicates that at the time of Augustine's mission, the Roman and British churches were by no means irreconcilable, and Augustine's willingness to travel across country to the west provides some sign that he genuinely expected to find common ground. But for the Britons to be considered legitimate evangelists it was necessary for them to conform to certain issues of Roman orthodoxy, such as the dating of Easter and the rite of baptism, as well as acquiesce to Augustine's authority. In this sense, Augustine's requirement of the Britons to join him in Catholic unity is similar to Aldhelm's appeal some seventy years later to Geraint of Dumnonia and his bishops, in which he lamented over the uselessness of 'good works' if 'performed outside the Catholic Church'.¹⁹¹

From Augustine's point of view, however, the *colloquia* were a complete failure, with the Britons refusing all of his demands. From the British side, there was probably very little reason for them to accede to Augustine's wishes, and some solid reasons for them not to. The British church in Wales had a long tradition, as compared to Augustine's see in Canterbury which at the time of the meetings had been in existence for less than a decade.¹⁹² The authority of the bishop of Rome to determine the hierarchy of episcopal control in the Roman West was not fully accepted at this stage. There was also little reason for the Britons to accept the Roman Easter; the method of calculation used in Rome during the papacy of Gregory was quite possibly still based on the inferior tables of Victorius of Aquitaine, which the Britons would have understandably eschewed.¹⁹³ Of most significance to the independent Britons was the fact that Augustine not only came to them as a representative of the pope but also as a bishop whose very position in Britain was under the patronage of an Anglo-Saxon overlord.¹⁹⁴ To recognise Augustine as superior would have placed the British bishops under the control of an emissary who was aligned with a foreign king and whose see lay in a distant territory. And indeed, Æthelberht himself may even have perceived Augustine's mission as a way

¹⁹⁰ Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 124. It should be acknowledged that there is no surviving evidence that Gregory ever counselled Augustine to actively seek assistance from the Britons in his evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons.

¹⁹¹ Aldhelm, *Epist.* IV, p. 155 (*supra.*, pp. 128-9).

¹⁹² J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), p. 77.

¹⁹³ K. Harrison, 'A letter from Rome to the Irish clergy, AD 640', *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp. 227-9; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 117. The use of the Victorian tables may have persisted until John IV was consecrated pope in 640.

¹⁹⁴ Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 109; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 133.

of extending his own dominion.¹⁹⁵ Thus, there were clear secular as well as ecclesiastical reasons for the British bishops to reject Augustine's demands.

Bede's account of the Augustine's Oak *colloquia* also reveals that the Britons refused to assist Augustine in the evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons. This was a point to which Bede returned throughout his *Historia ecclesiastica*,¹⁹⁶ and which formed the basis of much of his enmity towards the Britons.¹⁹⁷ On the face of it, this is a crucial point, as it suggests that the British clergy did not want to have anything to do with the Anglo-Saxons. Some recent scholarship has questioned Bede's assessment. Clare Stancliffe, for example, argues that it was Augustine's claim of authority over the Britons that was the main 'sticking point' rather than the evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons.¹⁹⁸ Her assertion is informed in part by the view of scholars such as Steven Bassett who contend that the Britons were responsible for the conversion of the Angles in the West Midlands,¹⁹⁹ and in part by what appears to be her distrust of Bede's motives.²⁰⁰ However, even if some of the details have been corrupted, there are grounds for following Bede's assessment.

It is entirely reasonable to suppose that Christianity operated as a 'rallying point' of resistance for the Britons against the Anglo-Saxons.²⁰¹ Their Christianity, at the time of the Roman mission, had long been established, as had their church organisation and hierarchy. Christianity, therefore, was an entrenched part of the Britons' identity, and would have informed the self-perception of the Britons, seen in Gildas as the people of a 'latter-day Israel', versus the Anglo-Saxon who were 'hated by God'.²⁰² In addition, there was some history of hostility in clerical quarters against the Anglo-Saxons as

¹⁹⁵ Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 112.

¹⁹⁶ *HE* I.22, II.2, II.20, V.22, V.23.

¹⁹⁷ *Supra.*, pp. 352-60.

¹⁹⁸ For example, Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 108-10, 132.

¹⁹⁹ *Supra.*, pp. 434-7.

²⁰⁰ Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 108-9, suggests that Bede misinterpreted the meaning of a letter of 596 sent from Pope Gregory to the Frankish kings Theuderic and Theudebert in 596 (see note 509, *supra.*, p. 360). In the letter, Gregory stated that the 'neighbouring bishops [*sacerdotes e vicino*]' refused to convert the Anglo-Saxons, and in the context of the letter he was probably referring to Frankish bishops (*MGH Epist.* I, no. VI.49, pp. 423-4; *EHD*, no. 162, pp. 790-1). However, Stancliffe argues that Bede would have read this as referring to the *British* bishops and that this is the origin of his conviction that the British never assisted in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Perhaps this also explains her otherwise inexplicable statement (p. 132): '*As far as we can tell from Bede's account, the evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons was not a sticking point for them [i.e. the Britons]*' (emphasis added). Bede does not refer to Gregory's letter in his *HE*, and it is by no means clear that he read it; so Stancliffe's argument is highly conjectural.

²⁰¹ *Supra.*, p. 427.

²⁰² *DEB* 23.1, 26.1. See also Higham, *Convert Kings*, p. 109, and even Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 139.

evidenced, for example, by St Germanus of Auxerre's rallying of a group of Romano-Britons against an Anglo-Saxon enemy which resulted in the 'Hallelujah victory'.²⁰³ The dearth of British clerics in eastern Britain also suggests, whatever view is taken of the nature of the *adventus Saxonum*, that the British church was disrupted, perhaps with clergy fleeing west to inform their brethren of the calamity in the east.²⁰⁴ In this context, it is quite understandable that the organised British church in Wales would have refused to share their Christianity with the Anglo-Saxons; they were not only an enemy but also a Barbarian people who did not deserve the Grace of Baptism.²⁰⁵ Gildas also presented the Saxons as being God's punishment of the corrupt Britons,²⁰⁶ and there is some question as to whether the British clergy would have considered evangelising such a people. As Ian Wood wonders: 'How can one think about evangelising the scourge of God?'.²⁰⁷ Bede may indeed have skewed his account of the Britons and their Christianity, but, as Patrick Sims-Williams states, 'the story [Bede presents] would have strained credulity had the Welsh bishops been known to have preached to their neighbours across the Severn in a concerted manner'.²⁰⁸

It appears, therefore, that the British church in Wales refused to cooperate with Augustine's Roman mission on all counts, which would have served to lay the foundations for a division between the two ecclesiastical traditions. The British bishops were doubtless also influenced by the growing asceticism in the British church, which may have underlined a self-perception of separateness from the more worldly church of the Romans.²⁰⁹ The Augustine's Oak conferences were a defining moment in terms of relations between the British church of Wales and the new Roman church of the Anglo-Saxons. The meetings saw the Britons clearly identified as schismatic by the Roman

²⁰³ E.A. Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 39-46.

²⁰⁴ Quensel von-Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', p. 95; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 118-19. Comparison could be made here with Stephen of Ripon's statement (*VW* 17) regarding the desertion of monastic communities by British clergy in Northumbria (*supra.*, pp. 304-5).

²⁰⁵ P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity AD 200-1000* (Massachusetts, 1997), p. 81. See the earlier discussion on Bede and the British refusal to convert the Anglo-Saxons in Northumbria (*supra.*, pp. 366-7).

²⁰⁶ For example, *DEB* 24.1.

²⁰⁷ I. Wood, cited by D.N. Dumville, 'The idea of government in sub-Roman Britain', in G. Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians* (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 215.

²⁰⁸ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 78.

²⁰⁹ The asceticism of some British monasteries is remarked upon by Gildas (*Fragmenta* 3, in M. Winterbottom, ed., *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and other Works*, Chichester, 2002, pp. 80-1, 143-4). See also Herren, 'Gildas and early British monasticism', pp. 76-7; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 45; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 117.

church, and established a pattern of distrust and isolation which characterised institutional relations for the rest of the seventh and much of the eighth century.²¹⁰

Institutional Interaction and Attitudes beyond Augustine's Oak

Evidence for the separateness of the British church of Wales from the Anglo-Saxons reappears and is reinforced in other seventh-century sources. Soon after Augustine's death, his successor Laurentius made further overtures to the British bishops. Bede says that Laurentius and his fellow-bishops sent a letter to the Britons, c.605-610, 'striving to bring them into catholic unity'.²¹¹ This was apparently not successful as indicated by Bede's reference to the 'present state of affairs'. And indeed, Laurentius's complaint in his other letter to the Irish about bishop Dagan refusing to eat with them was also presented as being indicative of British attitudes.

Aldhelm's letter to Geraint of Dumnonia, written c.672, provides a similar picture of British isolation in Wales. Aldhelm draws a distinction between the British Christians of Dumnonia and those across the Severn strait in Dyfed.²¹² The bishops of Dyfed were said to 'glory in the private purity of their own way of life', and to 'not deign to admit us [i.e. Catholics] to the company of their brotherhood until we have been compelled to spend the space of forty days in penance'.²¹³ It is not clear if the behaviour of these bishops was characteristic of all of Wales; nevertheless, Aldhelm's evidence supports a picture of British Christians still desiring to hold themselves in isolation from the Anglo-Saxons. And irrespective of whether the bishops of Dyfed disdained the Anglo-Saxons out of ascetic fanaticism rather than ethnic discord, as has been claimed,²¹⁴ the salient point is that Aldhelm clearly believed that they were antagonistic to the Roman church of the Anglo-Saxons. Thus, an attitude of animosity between British and Anglo-Saxon clergy was in evidence. Further, Aldhelm's letter would have conveyed such an impression to anyone who read it.²¹⁵ His reference to the British form of monasticism

²¹⁰ It was Sir John Edward Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (London, 1939), vol. I, p. 194, who described the seventh and eighth centuries as 'the Age of Isolation' in Welsh history.

²¹¹ *HE* II.4. Unlike the bishops' letter to the Irish bishops, this one to the Britons was not recorded by Bede. The letter to the Irish has been commented on earlier (*supra.*, p. 131).

²¹² *Supra.*, pp. 130-1.

²¹³ Aldhelm, *Epist.* IV, p. 158.

²¹⁴ See Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 110, who argues that it was the Roman clerics' sinfulness as worldly clerics rather than their different Christian tradition or ethnicity which mattered to the British monks.

²¹⁵ As stated in Chapter 5 (*supra.*, p. 127), it does not appear that Bede saw Aldhelm's letter to Geraint, though he did know of it.

as 'a life of contemplative retirement away in some squalid wilderness' would scarcely have encouraged a positive attitude towards British Christianity.²¹⁶

It would be erroneous, nevertheless, to insist that there was no interaction between the British church of Wales and the Anglo-Saxons in the seventh century. The fact that Aldhelm could report that Catholics were not accepted into the company of the brethren in Dyfed obviously indicates that some contact must have been attempted. Perhaps there were further entreaties to conform to Roman orthodoxy, offered in the same vein as Aldhelm's letter to Geraint. The consecration of Chad in c.655 by Bishop Wine of Wessex, 'with the assistance of two bishops of the British, who ... keep Easter Sunday, according to their rule',²¹⁷ further tells of interaction between British and Anglo-Saxon Christians.²¹⁸ That this affair involved Wine of Wessex does suggest, however, that the British bishops may have been from Dumnonia rather than Wales. This would be consistent with Aldhelm's account which implies that the Britons of south-western Wales, at least, were more antagonistic than the Dumnonians.

There survives, therefore, little evidence for institutional interaction between the British church of Wales and the Anglo-Saxon church for much of the seventh century.

Christian influence from Wales in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons is possible, but the sources are silent on the matter.²¹⁹ By Bede's time in the early eighth century, the view was clearly one of mutual suspicion between the two churches, and the publication of his *Historia ecclesiastica* would have further popularised the attitudes that he reported.²²⁰ Felix's *Life of St Guthlac*, written contemporaneously with Bede's great work, would similarly have promoted a negative view of the Britons. The *Life* contains an account of the saint being assailed by demons disguised as a host of Britons, thus equating them with evil.²²¹ Felix also referred to their speech as 'sibilant [*strimulentas*]', or 'barbarous [*barbaras*]'. These statements reveal a continuing dislike of Britons, as well as a sense of superiority over them. Though the Britons were

²¹⁶ Aldhelm, *Epist.* IV, p. 156.

²¹⁷ *HE* III.28.

²¹⁸ This incident was discussed in Chapter 5 (*supra.*, pp. 132-3).

²¹⁹ Loyn, 'The conversion of the English to Christianity', p. 31; Ray, 'Archaeology and the three early churches of Herefordshire', p. 109; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 77. This includes the Welsh sources, such as they are.

²²⁰ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 10.

²²¹ *VG* 34 (*supra.*, pp. 404, 425-6).

Christian, their non-orthodoxy meant that they could still be employed by Anglo-Saxon hagiographers and historians as representatives of the devil.²²²

This state of affairs appears to have persisted for most of the eighth century, in which era there continues to be a dearth of evidence for any interaction between the British and Anglo-Saxon churches.²²³ The eighth century was primarily characterised by warfare and hostility between the Britons of Wales and the Mercians, a secular milieu in which amicable ecclesiastical relations should not be expected. Æthelbald of Mercia (716-757) was said in a *Llandaff Charter* to have appropriated British churches and estates on the Wye, which, if true, would have understandably left the British church hierarchy ambivalent regarding interaction with the Anglo-Saxons.²²⁴ Offa's plea to Pope Hadrian I to allow the creation of a new archdiocese was argued, in part, on the basis of the 'extension' of the English, presumably Mercian, realm.²²⁵ This may have included expansion in the direction of Wales. The papal legate's mission in 786 to investigate the matter may have included a tour of parts of Wales, if that is how the phrase *Britannie partes* is to be translated.²²⁶ This evidence further suggests a loss of territory to the Mercians and a potential loss of ecclesiastical control by the British church.

Yet, within this environment of secular hostility, it seems that the Britons of Wales finally capitulated and conformed to the Roman Easter. This is attested only in *Annales Cambriae*, in which it is recorded under the year 768 that, 'Easter is changed among the Britons ... Elfoddw, man of God, emending it [*Pasca commutatur apud Brittones ... emendante Elbodugo homine Dei*]'.²²⁷ This Elfoddw is said under his obit of 809 to have been 'archbishop of Gwynedd [*archiepiscopus Guenedotae regione*]'.²²⁸ Apart from these references, the capitulation is an otherwise obscure event for which no detail

²²² D. Banham, 'Anglo-Saxon attitudes: in search of the origins of English racism', *European Review of History* 1 (1994), p. 148.

²²³ D.N. Dumville, 'The historical value of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Arthurian Literature* 6 (1986), p. 24; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 168.

²²⁴ LL 192 (Davies, *Llandaff Charters*, pp. 112-13).

²²⁵ EHD, no. 205, p. 861.

²²⁶ EHD, no. 191, p. 837. As Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 168, states, no more is heard regarding the legate's tour of Wales. On this tour, see also T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', in M.P. Brown & C.A. Farr (eds.), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), pp. 99-100.

²²⁷ AC s.a.

²²⁸ AC s.a. This is one of only two pre-eleventh-century references to archbishops in Wales, the other being Asser's (ch. 79) use of the term in reference to Nobis of St Davids. See Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 158-60). Later sources associate Elfoddw with Bangor, but there is no pre-Conquest evidence for this.

survives.²²⁹ It is not known, therefore, if it came about due to pressure from Mercia; whether it can be attributed to any interaction with the Anglo-Saxon church, or whether it occurred solely due to a revelation on the part of Elfoddw. At the time, the Britons of Wales were the sole remaining Christian people of Britain and Ireland to reject the Roman calculation. Perhaps the weight of their isolation – not only from the Anglo-Saxons but also the Irish and Scots, the Picts and probably the Britons of Dumnonia and Strathclyde – finally motivated them to fall into line. A synod may have been convened by Elfoddw in which the matter was decided.²³⁰ Though it is not stated in the *Annales* entry whether the Britons of Wales adopted the full gamut of Roman observances, and thus accepted the authority of the Roman church at Canterbury, this tends to be assumed in the secondary literature.²³¹

Whatever the circumstances, it may be argued that the capitulation of 768 precipitated the opening up of Wales to more outside influences, though there is little evidence that anything immediately changed.²³² The only hint of direct clerical contact between Wales and Mercia for the remainder of the eighth century is the inclusion of a prayer by a person with the Old Welsh name Moucan (Modern Welsh Meugan) in a late eighth-century Worcester prayer book.²³³ The tour of 786 by the papal legate into parts of Wales may be evidence for the beginning of a process of cooperation or even unification. From the ninth-century, however, the evidence becomes more abundant. The *Historia Brittonum* of 829/30, which contains a substantial amount of Anglo-Saxon and specifically Northumbrian material, is itself evidence for the ‘development of English cultural influence in Wales’.²³⁴ An early ninth-century Welsh manuscript further contains an alphabet based on the Anglo-Saxon runic *futhorc*, but with Old Welsh names.²³⁵ At about this time, c.840, a list of British monks at Lindisfarne was recorded in the Lindisfarne/Durham *Liber Vitae*, apparently written down by an Anglo-

²²⁹ Lloyd, *History of Wales*, vol. I, p. 203, noted that in the Gwentian *Brut* of the eighteenth century, the Britons of southern Wales were said to have resisted the change to the Roman Easter, but rightly assessed this evidence as untrustworthy.

²³⁰ Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 161.

²³¹ For example, Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 223; J. Davies, *History of Wales*, pp. 78-9. *Contra* Charles-Edwards, ‘Wales and Mercia, 613-918’, p. 99.

²³² Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom*, p. 223; Dumville, ‘The historical value of the *Historia Brittonum*’, p. 24; M. Miller, ‘Starting to write history: Gildas, Bede and “Nennius”’, *WHR* 8 (1976-7), pp. 462-3.

²³³ This is reported by Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 169, 280. Sims-Williams also notes that there are no Anglo-Saxon names in any of the *Llandaff Charters* putatively of eighth century, as compared to those from the late tenth century and onwards when such names become common. See also Davies, *Llandaff Charters*, p. 145.

²³⁴ Dumville, ‘The historical value of the *Historia Brittonum*’, p. 24.

Saxon scribe as he heard them pronounced.²³⁶ Dumville suggests that it may have been through these monks that Anglo-Saxon material was brought into Wales.²³⁷

Commemorations of non-Celtic and specifically Anglo-Saxon saints can also be found in Wales, typically as single dedications; some of these may date from the ninth century; however none is recorded prior to the eleventh.²³⁸ The pattern of unique localised dedications in Wales does, however, have more in common with Cornwall than with Anglo-Saxon England, which suggests that British ecclesiastical organisation persisted.²³⁹ The influence of Asser in the last quarter of the ninth century is a further stage in the process of cultural interaction, when Britons made a substantial contribution to the revival of learning in Wessex.²⁴⁰

The reason for the relative wealth of sources for ecclesiastical and cultural interaction between the Britons of Wales and the Anglo-Saxons in the ninth century and onwards may be because a textual watershed was reached. Nevertheless, there is evidence from Bede, Aldhelm and Felix that, prior to the last quarter of the eighth century, there was little institutional interaction between the British and Anglo-Saxon churches. This is reinforced by the comparative lateness of the adoption of the Roman Easter in Wales. The British church does not appear to have provided any framework for the Christianity of the Anglo-Saxons.²⁴¹ The organised British church, as a reflection of cultural identity, may simply not have been attractive to the Anglo-Saxons.²⁴² Similarly, British clerics may have initially eschewed the pagan Anglo-Saxons for their unworthiness,

²³⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Auct. F. 4.32 (S.C. 2176), fo. 20^r. See D.N. Dumville, 'Nennius and the *Historia Britonum*', *SC* 10-11 (1975-6), p. 90, who dates the manuscript to 817.

²³⁶ Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, p. 59, provides the example of Cundigeorn, which is a partly Anglicised spelling of the Old Welsh name Cintigern.

²³⁷ Dumville, 'The historical value of the *Historia Brittonum*', p. 25.

²³⁸ The Anglo-Saxon saints commemorated include: SS. Millburga, Edmund, Edith, Kenelm, Etheldreda, Oswald, Edward, Chad and Cuthbert. Cardiganshire even boasts a dedication to Ine of Wessex. The most common non-Celtic dedications in Wales are to Our Lady and to St Michael. See Yates, 'The distribution and proportion of Celtic and non-Celtic church dedications in Wales', pp. 5-17, esp. pp. 9-10, for the only systematic study of Celtic versus non-Celtic dedications in Wales. Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 146, claims that dedications to Oswald and Cuthbert are from the ninth century though she provides no evidence. *Contra*. O. Chadwick, 'The evidence of dedications in the early history of the Welsh church', in N.K. Chadwick (ed.), *Studies in Early British History* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 177, who lists only three Celtic dedications which are recorded in Wales or the West Midlands prior to the eleventh century.

²³⁹ Yates, 'The distribution and proportion of Celtic and non-Celtic church dedications in Wales', pp. 7-9. See also Edwards, 'Identifying the archaeology of the early church in Wales and Cornwall', p. 49, regarding the nature of dedications in Wales.

²⁴⁰ Dumville, 'The historical value of the *Historia Brittonum*', p. 26.

²⁴¹ Quensel von-Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', p. 89; Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', p. 135.

²⁴² J. Hines, cited in Dumville, 'The idea of government in sub-Roman Britain', p. 214; Quensel von-Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', p. 89.

and, subsequent to the Anglo-Saxon conversion in the south, rejected the worldliness of their Roman Christianity. As Sims-Williams concludes regarding the range of influences on early Anglo-Saxon Christianity in the West Midlands: 'Only the influence of the neighbouring Welsh church is conspicuous by its absence'.²⁴³

Summary

There exists a paradox in the evidence for ecclesiastical interaction amongst the Mercians, West Midland Angles and Britons of Wales. On the one hand, the absence of pagan Anglo-Saxon burials throughout much of the West Midlands and the lack of a clear conversion narrative suggest that the newcomers were converted at an early date, probably by Christian Britons who continued to live in the region. On the other hand, the evidence for institutional interaction points to a refusal on the part of the British clergy to take part in the evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons. Indeed, for much of the seventh and eighth centuries, the British church in Wales seems to have remained opposed to the Anglo-Saxon church.

A possible resolution of this apparent paradox may come from not assuming that there were necessarily British clergy involved in the conversion of the pagan immigrants to the West Midlands. The evidence of the cult of St Sixtus indicates that local British veneration could endure even in the absence of any real church institutions.²⁴⁴ What is proposed here, therefore, is that the West Midland Angles – the Hwicce, *Magonsætan*, and *Wreocensætan* – learned their Christianity as a 'folk religion'.²⁴⁵ In other words, they were exposed to Christianity not through any British clergy or mission or surviving church structure, but rather by direct contact with lay British Christians who continued their belief at a local level and whose faith was more deeply entrenched in the west than in the east. There does not need to have been any institutional Romano-British church survival in the West Midlands to explain the adoption of Christianity. The conversion of the West Midland Angles by the Britons amongst them has already been suggested in the literature;²⁴⁶ however, the full significance of this has not been hitherto realised, with scholars presuming (or even insisting on) there having been clerical involvement. Conversion by British clerics does not need to have occurred. In this regard, the general

²⁴³ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, p. 114.

²⁴⁴ See Stancliffe, 'The British church and the mission of Augustine', pp. 117-19, regarding British Christianity in the east of Britain.

²⁴⁵ Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, p. 207.

absence of any enduring British influence on the Christianity of the West Midland Angles is quite explicable, as is the dearth of any evidence for ecclesiastical interaction with the British church in Wales, and indeed Bede's insistence that the Britons refused to take part in the evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons.

Conversion of incoming pagans to the West Midlands was likely to have come about through local-level interaction, rather than as a result of any action instigated or even condoned by the British church or clergy.²⁴⁷ The Britons in the West Midlands may not have had the same reservations about the sharing of their religion with their Anglian neighbours. Proselytising to the Anglo-Saxons may have concerned the *doctores* of Bangor-is-Coed, who appreciated the implications of such action for the providential history of the Britons, but not necessarily the members of lay communities of British Christians.

²⁴⁶ For example, Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the West Midlands', p. 39; Pretty, 'Defining the Magonsæte', p. 175; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 78-9.

²⁴⁷ There is also no reason to think that an organised British church in the West Midlands would not have been disrupted as it was in the east of Britain.

Conclusion to Part 3: Mercia and the Britons of Wales

Kate Pretty has written of the difficulty inherent in attempting to ‘disentangle the confused muddle of Mercians and Welsh along the border’.¹ Indeed, the history of interaction between the Mercians and Angles of the West Midlands and the Britons of Wales is characterised by complexity and convolution, perhaps more so than any of the frontiers examined in this thesis. The detailed origins of Anglo-Saxon involvement in the West Midlands, and of the Mercian kingdom itself, are beyond recovery.² This makes the task of examining their relations with the Britons, who provided the very frontier from which the Mercians were probably named, a difficult one. The naming of the Mercians as ‘dwellers on the frontier’ suggests that there existed a separation between territory which was considered to be under Anglo-Saxon versus British control.³ It is likely that this frontier was in fact a march of disputed territory: a contact zone with mixed and overlapping settlement and political structures which fluctuated throughout the pre-Viking period. In this regard, the long ‘Welsh’ border should have been fertile ground for interaction between the two groups of people.

The evidence indicates that the first half of the seventh century was a time of military cooperation between the Mercians and the Britons of Wales. The alliances of Penda of Mercia with Cadwallon and other kings of Gwynedd, and probably Powys, are the best known of associations between Angle and Briton in pre-Viking Britain. Penda’s alliances with various British kings were almost certainly forged by a need to resist the military overlordship being wielded by the kings of Northumbria.⁴ It is probable that these alliances represented a form of military clientship, with superiority passing from Cadwallon in the 630s to Penda in the 640s. On Penda’s death in 655, however, it is uncertain if Mercia continued to exercise any military authority over the British kingdoms; with the threat of Northumbria removed by the death of Ecgrith in 685, it appears that there was a transformation in relations in which Mercia emerged as the

¹ K. Pretty, ‘Defining the Magonsæte’, in Bassett, *Origins*, p. 183.

² T.M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Wales and Mercia, 613-918’, in M.P. Brown & C.A. Farr (eds.), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), pp. 89, 94-5; B. Yorke, ‘The origins of Mercia’, in Brown & Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, p. 21.

³ D. Hill, ‘Mercians: the dwellers on the boundary’, in Brown & Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, p. 178.

⁴ M.P. Brown & C.A. Farr, ‘Introduction: Mercia, a culture in context’, in *idem.*, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, p. 4; Charles-Edwards, ‘Wales and Mercia, 613-918’, p. 93.

aggressor.⁵ This would explain the evidence for hostility which surfaces in the eighth century. This was a period during which it could be more reasonably supposed that Mercian kings, notably Æthelbald and Offa, purposed to extend their overlordship of the kingdoms of southern Britain into Wales. Æthelbald certainly styled himself as *rex Brittaniae*, and Offa's *imperium*-wielding ambitions are not in dispute. Offa's construction of the Dyke was a clear symbol of a divide between Angle and Briton, one which would have deepened the perception of difference between the two peoples. The Dyke also demonstrated to the British the power of the Mercian king. But for the Britons of Wales, especially those of Powys along the border, the threat was potentially more serious than just the imposition of some form of Mercian hegemony and tribute payment; the elimination of their direct and independent rulership remained a distinct possibility. The Britons' corresponding threat to any Mercian hegemony in the West Midlands is reflected in the perceived need for the Dyke itself.

The shape of relations at a local level along the frontier would also have changed over the course of the seventh and eighth centuries. The relative lack of material evidence for a large Anglian population in the West Midlands provides a basis for supposing that there persisted a notable ethnically-British population in territory that came to be controlled by the westerly Mercian satellites. This implies that there was the potential for a significant degree of 'grass-roots' influence from British to Anglian culture. Yet it is difficult to find clear evidence for this in either the written, archaeological or onomastic sources. There survive place-names in *wealh* which indicate enclaves of British speakers in Anglian territory, but the proportion of British place-names is quite low, even in westerly counties such as Shropshire. There are no textual references to Britons living within Mercian or Anglian territory in the West Midlands. The extent of influence is confined to the hypothesis that the West Midland Angles were converted to Christianity by their British neighbours and/or tenants, an eventuality which is not likely to have been condoned by church leaders in the heartland of Wales.

What is implied is that while there may have been initial cooperation between Angles and Britons, the seventh century saw a period during which West Midland territory not under British political control was systematically Anglicised.⁶ Through some manner

⁵ Brown & Farr, 'Introduction: Mercia, a culture in context', p. 4.

⁶ Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', p. 97.

of 'ethnic imperialism',⁷ perhaps in the vein of the Law Code of Ine, it is likely that British language and other cultural artefacts were discouraged. The necessity for Anglicisation would have been more of an issue along the frontier, where by the end of the seventh century British cultural practices may have become too uncomfortably close to rebellion for Anglian rulers. This may explain the paucity of British place-names in Shropshire in particular. With the arrival of the hard-line Theodore as archbishop of Canterbury in 669, it is almost certain that any vestige of British Christian practice in the West Midlands was methodically erased.⁸ The divide between the Roman church of the Anglo-Saxons and the church of the Britons of Wales, which persisted through most of the eighth century, would have further hardened the perception of difference between Briton and Angle. There is also little evidence for trade across the frontier between the Anglian West Midlands and independent Wales, a situation doubtless affected by the barrier of the Dyke.⁹

The British Church in Wales eventually capitulated to the Roman Easter, and Anglo-Saxon cultural influence eventually found its way into Wales. By the end of the eighth century, the Britons of Wales had also been subject to the imperialist campaigns of Offa, who himself was probably continuing in the footsteps of his predecessor Æthelbald. Anglo-Saxon interest in Wales was, therefore, well-established in the pre-Viking period and doubtless influenced the ambitions of subsequent kings of Mercia, and of Wessex, who during the ninth century exercised overlordship in Wales.¹⁰

⁷ L. Quensel von-Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', *ASSAH* 10 (1999) p. 96.

⁸ Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', p. 96.

⁹ Hill, 'Mercians: the dwellers on the boundary', p. 177.

¹⁰ For example, *ASC* s.a. 828 (*recte* 830), 'King Ecgberht led the army among the Welsh [i.e. of Wales], and he reduced them to humble submission'; *ASC* s.a. 853, 'Burhred, king of Mercia, and his councillors asked King Æthelwulf that he would help them to subject the Welsh ... He then did so, and with the army went through Mercia into Wales, and they made them all subject to them'; *AC* s.a. 816, 'Saxons invaded the mountains of Eryri [i.e. Snowdonia] and the kingdom of Rhufoniog'; *AC* s.a. 818, 'Coenwulf devastated the Dyfed region'; *AC* s.a. 822, 'The fortress of Degannwy is destroyed by the Saxons and they took the kingdom of Powys into their own control'; *AC* s.a. 849, 'Meurig was killed by Saxons'.

Chapter 14

Conclusion

It has been the aim of this thesis to provide a reconsideration and reinterpretation of the evidence for Anglo-Celtic interaction in pre-Viking Britain, c.600-800.¹ This is the first time that a comprehensive examination of the 'Celtic border' from southern through to northern Britain for these centuries has been attempted, encompassing interaction between the Anglo-Saxons and *all* of their Celtic neighbours, the Britons, the Scots and the Picts. In addition, the thesis has surveyed a spectrum of issues, encompassing not only aggression, warfare and conquest but also assimilation, continuity and social exchange, both in secular and ecclesiastical contexts. In this manner, the aim has been to reveal a full canvas of relations such that a more even-handed view could be presented. The most obvious conclusion that can be made about Anglo-Celtic interaction in pre-Viking Britain is that it is foolhardy to attempt a categorisation in any simplistic or essentialist manner. Interaction at the border has been found to be much more complex than just the marshalling of Celtic forces against a relentless Anglo-Saxon aggressor,² or indeed, simply the voluntary abandonment by the Celts, or rather Britons, of their identity so as to become Anglo-Saxons.³ What conclusions, then, can be reached regarding relations between the Anglo-Saxons and Celts?

Warfare, Conquest and Territorial Expansion

Warfare between the Anglo-Saxons and Celts of pre-Viking Britain occurred within a context where identifiable kingdoms had already been established. The focus of the thesis on the period c.600-800 has meant that much of the ethnographical confusion which characterised the previous two sub-Roman centuries could be avoided. The creation of a multiplicity of kingdoms by c.600 was elucidated, within the limits of the source material. Certain singular truths about ethnicity – for example, that ethnic identity is an expression of kings and politics – could, therefore, be regarded as given.

¹ As exhorted by David Dumville during the concluding symposium of the 'Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century' conference, compiled by G. Ausenda, 'Current issues and future directions in the study of early Anglo-Saxon England', in Hines, *Anglo-Saxons*, p. 432.

² W. Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford, 1990), p. 62.

Hence, in the arena of 'foreign relations' between extant Anglo-Saxon and Celtic polities, the existence of ethnic identities could, within reason, be taken for granted, and certainly the written sources provide evidence of a clear belief in the difference between the Anglo-Saxons and the Celts in the various neighbouring kingdoms. This meant that any warfare between Anglo-Saxons and Celts occurred within an increasingly self-conscious ethnographical milieu and would have reinforced any incipient sense of difference or separation.

Because of the much more extensive border with the Britons, it was with these Celtic kingdoms that the Anglo-Saxons were most frequently at war. The truism that hostilities are most often observed between nations or ethnic groups who are neighbours was thus borne out.⁴ No matter what 'peaceful interaction scenarios' have been argued by various modern scholars,⁵ aggression between Anglo-Saxons and Britons clearly occurred throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, with regional and chronological variations. Some warfare was of an endemic nature, which involved raiding, ravaging and 'banditry', and acted a means by which individual prowess, leadership, and heroic feats of arms could be demonstrated.⁶ However, some was very obviously of a 'non-ritual' nature, concerned with conquest and the permanent acquisition of land and property. It was the Britons who faced the brunt of Anglo-Saxon expansion during the sub-Roman period, and this continued into the seventh and eighth centuries, though within more focussed geographical bounds. This period witnessed the demise of three documented British kingdoms in the north, and the loss of territory under British political control in the West Midlands and the south-west.

However, the nature of Anglo-Saxon expansion in these two centuries cannot be said to have necessarily followed a similar course to that of the sub-Roman period. The emergence of kingdoms by the beginning of the seventh century means that the expansion of Anglo-Saxon control was increasingly likely to have been at the behest of

³ As suggested by S. Bassett, 'How the west was won: the Anglo-Saxon takeover of the west midlands', *ASSAH* 11 (2000), p. 115.

⁴ C. Renfrew, 'Prehistory and the identity of Europe, or, don't let's be beastly to the Hungarians', in P. Graves-Brown, S. Jones & C. Gamble (eds.), *Cultural Identity and Archaeology: The Construction of European Communities* (London, 1996), p. 129.

⁵ To borrow C.A. Snyder's phrase, *An Age of Tyrants: Britain and the Britons A.D. 400-600* (Pennsylvania, 1998), p. 249.

⁶ G. Halsall, 'Anthropology and the study of pre-Conquest warfare and society: the ritual war in Anglo-Saxon England', in S. Chadwick-Hawkes (ed.), *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 156-9.

kings or sub-kings, rather than freelance initiatives on the part of migrants or 'settlers'.⁷ This can be observed, for example, in the activities of seventh-century Northumbrian rulers such as Æthelfrith, and eighth-century Mercians such as Offa. Kings figure prominently in the records of warfare; though this may to some extent reflect the biases of annalists, it is nevertheless a point which has not been adequately emphasised in the secondary literature. Instead of supposing, therefore, some process of 'expansion via ethnogenesis' in which Germanic settlers assimilated with the natives to jointly become Anglo-Saxons, as is routinely argued for the sub-Roman period, expansion in the seventh and eighth centuries was by peoples already led by kings and thus already with an emergent identity. This would have been increasingly the case the further we progress through the period under examination. The clear implication is that the new Anglo-Saxon ruler over British territory, irrespective of whether he was a more distant overlord or a direct king, was less a *primus inter pares*, less an elected or raised war leader, than a tyrant.⁸ Indeed, his rulership was something that was externally imposed rather than something that emerged from within. This is a fundamental point that is overlooked by those scholars who have opted for the ethnogenetic model of 'peaceful' expansion, for which, in any event, there is little specific, evidentiary basis.

That expansion into British territory during the seventh and eighth centuries was led and controlled by Anglo-Saxon kings has further implications. Such expansion would have played a significant role in the consolidation of a king's power. With the direct annexation of British territory and the subsequent availability of war-loot, kings could reward followers with wealth and land grants of a magnitude that was not possible in the non-border kingdoms. Evidence that this occurred is demonstrated by the fact that the most successful and largest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the seventh and eighth centuries were those in the west and north.⁹

Northumbria grew rapidly in the seventh century, until Ecgrith's denouement at the battle of Dunnichen in 685. This strongly implies that its success was founded upon the regular annexation of British land for grants, the appropriation of other forms of wealth to ensure the loyalty of a warband, as well as the collection of tribute from still-

⁷ J.R. Maddicott, 'Two frontier states: Northumbria and Wessex, c.650-750', in J.R. Maddicott & D.M. Palliser (eds.), *The Medieval State: Essays Presented to James Campbell* (London, 2000), p. 26.

⁸ A. Woolf, 'Community, identity and kingship in early England', in W.O. Frazer & A. Tyrrell (eds.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London, 2000), p. 108.

⁹ J. Hines, 'Cultural change and social organisation in early Anglo-Saxon England', in G. Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians* (Woodbridge, 1995), p. 83.

independent native rulers.¹⁰ Northumbria thus advanced as a kingdom by a process involving the domination of surrounding polities and the absorption of British kingdoms under its direct rulership. Mercia's size and eminence were similarly built around the proceeds of overlordship achieved by military force or the threat of it.¹¹ The evidence is not sufficient to determine the exact nature of political control in the West Midlands in the seventh century, and so whether or not British-controlled territory was annexed and given to Mercian sub-kings and ealdormen. It would be tempting to view Mercia's western satellites in this manner, as well as to suppose that a Mercian *ætheling* could have achieved wealth and status by taking up rule over some marcher unit.¹² However, during the eighth century, Mercian foreign policy seems to have advanced from overlordship to the absorption of surrounding kingdoms,¹³ and the annexation of British territory definitely occurred, for example in Powys.¹⁴ It was in this century that Mercia became the most powerful kingdom in Anglo-Saxon England. Wessex, by contrast, did not reach quite the same size and position as Northumbria and Mercia in the pre-Viking centuries. No West Saxon king achieved the status of the Northumbrian and Mercian *imperium*-wielders until the ninth century. Certainly, there were increases in land that came with expansion into the south-west and that could be used to reward followers, but this was within a more restricted geographical sphere, given the limits placed on northward expansion by the growth of Mercia.¹⁵ Indeed, Wessex could advance into only one clearly identifiable British polity in the south-west,¹⁶ compared to Mercia and Northumbria which both had long borders with British-controlled territory, as well as access to the other northern Celts in the case of Northumbria.

In order for expansionist Anglo-Saxon kings to consolidate their hold on newly-acquired British territory it was necessary for them to consider deliberate arrangements for its administration. The imposition of overlordship over a native ruler was one stage

¹⁰ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', in M.P. Brown & C.A. Farr (eds.), *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), p. 94; Maddicott, 'Two frontier states: Northumbria and Wessex', p. 37.

¹¹ Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', pp. 94-5.

¹² This may be imposing too much order on the process by which political control expanded in early Anglo-Saxon England. See D.N. Dumville, 'The terminology of overkingship in early Anglo-Saxon England', in Hines, *Anglo-Saxons*, p. 358.

¹³ P. Featherstone, 'The Tribal Hidage and the ealdormen of Mercia', in Brown & Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, p. 30.

¹⁴ D. Hill, 'Mercians: the dwellers on the boundary', in Brown & Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, p. 178.

¹⁵ Maddicott, 'Two frontier states: Northumbria and Wessex', pp. 25-45, has also made a case that there was less to exploit in the south-west in terms of mineral and other natural resources. In his words, 'Wessex ... came to dominate a more moribund political and economic landscape' (p. 45).

in this process, and certainly part of Northumbria's wealth in the seventh century came from the levying of tribute from dependent kingdoms.¹⁷ Direct rulership by an Anglo-Saxon king, as a subsequent stage, required more extensive administrative arrangements. In the seventh century this doubtless involved allotting territory to the Anglo-Saxon *subreguli* and other members of the aristocracy who can be glimpsed in the written records for the three kingdoms under study, and whose status became revised to that of ealdorman or thegn in the eighth century. New land was also incorporated by grants to monasteries. This can be seen most clearly in Wessex, where the charter evidence attests to bequests by kings to monasteries on the western frontier, such as Malmesbury, Glastonbury and Sherborne; perhaps also Melrose and Coldingham fulfilled a similar purpose in Northumbria. New territory could also be administered by the creation of 'frontier bishoprics', for example, Sherborne on the West Saxon border with Dumnonia, Walchstod's unnamed see beyond the Severn in the West Midlands, Abercorn along the Forth in the north of Northumbria, also administering the Picts, and Whithorn in Galloway in Northumbria's far north-west.¹⁸ Anglo-Saxon settlement was the ultimate stage in the process of absorption of British territory; this is strongly implied in the plethora of *sæte*-names to be found in the west of Wessex and along the length of the border between Mercia and the British kingdoms of Wales. Ine's laws for Britons within newly-acquired territory in Wessex reveal that there must have been Saxons living amongst them who would have benefited from being granted land as colonists.¹⁹ Anglo-Saxon *subreguli* or ealdormen would not have taken up a frontier lordship without the support of followers, retainers or a warband.²⁰ Some of these individuals would eventually have settled down with land and family.²¹

The relative remoteness from Anglo-Saxon territory of Dalriada and Pictland meant that they were not forced into quite the same defensive position as the British kingdoms of pre-Viking Britain. Warfare is recorded in the sources involving both groups of Celts, although there is only one clear instance of a battle between Dalriada and Northumbria, interestingly when the relevant rulers of both kingdoms, Aedán and Æthelfrith, were pursuing their respective overlordship ambitions in the north. The Picts were subjected,

¹⁶ This point could be qualified by allowing the possibility of advance into south-east Wales.

¹⁷ This may be akin to Mercia's inner and outer zones of authority, as explained by Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', pp. 94-5.

¹⁸ Maddicott, 'Two frontier states: Northumbria and Wessex', p. 27.

¹⁹ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Anglo-Saxon kinship revisited', in Hines, *Anglo-Saxons*, p. 199.

²⁰ S.S. Evans, *The Lords of Battle: Image and Reality of the Comitatus in Dark-Age Britain* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 65-6.

however, to the more direct attention of Northumbrian kings. Part of southern Pictland was, for a number of decades in the seventh century, subsumed under direct Northumbrian rule. A far-northern Northumbrian lordship was almost certainly created to administer this region, in addition to the bishopric of Abercorn. Northumbrian kings in the seventh century were able to exploit overlordship arrangements, however temporary, imposed over Pictland, and according to Bede, Dalriada, further contributing to their wealth and success. The creation of systematic assessment arrangements for the collection of tribute, or the provision of service such as military support, from dependent Celtic kingdoms, can be presumed.

It must be recognised, however, that the formation and development of the various polities of pre-Viking Britain was not simply a matter of the Celts having to settle for the leftovers of Anglo-Saxon domination. Indeed, the Celts offered continued and effective resistance to Anglo-Saxon incursion. To be sure, some British kingdoms were extinguished, but others endured well past the pre-Viking period. This is an achievement that deserves greater acknowledgment, particularly as it stands in contrast to the fate of the Continental western Roman Empire where various 'Barbarian' peoples took control of nearly all areas within the fifth century,²² and where no native dynasty emerged to rule over any post-imperial kingdom.²³ The 'de-Romanisation' of Britain led to a decentralisation of power and the creation of smaller kingdoms that were harder to overcome. Expansion by the Anglo-Saxons should not, therefore, be viewed as something which was steady, permanent, uninterrupted, or indeed inevitable. Celts could assuredly be aggressors, for instance, Cadwallon of Gwynedd and the Pictish king Oengus son of Forghus, and territory was retaken by Celts from Anglo-Saxons. There were also periods of peace between Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and military cooperation. Penda allied with various British leaders in the seventh century, and was probably a client of Cadwallon before the latter's death. In the eighth century, Oengus of the Picts allied with Eadberht – who may have acknowledged Oengus's overlordship – to attack the British stronghold of Dumbarton, and had the only recorded treaty of peace (*foedus pacis*) between a Celtic and Anglo-Saxon kingdom in the pre-Viking

²¹ For example, the *duguð* (veteran) of *Beowulf* or the 1200 shilling man of Ine's Code.

²² J. Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), p. 69; B. Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', *EHR* 115 (2000), p. 527. Ward-Perkins notes that one of the few areas that remained outside Barbarian control was Brittany, a bastion of Celtic identity through to the modern day.

²³ A. Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', in H. Goetz, J. Jarnut & W. Pohl (eds.), *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 345-6.

period. A good case can also be made for a period of amicability between Dumnonia and Wessex during part of Aldhelm's abbacy or episcopate. Geraint of Dumnonia may even at this time have been under West Saxon suzerainty. Such periods of peace were not necessarily long-lived, being centred on individual rulers rather than enduring statements of policy.²⁴

The question of whether warfare between Anglo-Saxons and Celts in the pre-Viking period was ethnically motivated remains contentious, especially amongst historians of early medieval Europe who live in this modern era when ethnicity, however it is constructed, has so obviously played a part in civil wars and the genocidal exhortations of dictators. Did warfare in the seventh and eighth centuries ever originate out of some ethnically-based hostility and was ethnicity ever used as a rallying call by Celts or Anglo-Saxons? No specific evidence has been found, beyond what appears in the saga poetry, that the different Celtic peoples ever banded together against the Anglo-Saxons. It appears that several British kings and their warbands joined forces against various Northumbrian aggressors. However, this was also in concert with Penda of Mercia.²⁵ Certain Celtic kings were concerned about the expansion of Anglo-Saxon control in Britain, such as Aedán of Dalriada who moved against the expansionist Æthelfrith. But he does not appear to have joined forces with any British or Pictish king in his advance. There were also instances of Anglo-Saxon kings joining in warfare against British foes, for example, Ine of Wessex and Nunna of Sussex against Geraint of Dumnonia, and Æthelbald of Mercia and Æthelheard and Cuthred of Wessex against Britons in Wales. But it is not clear whether these alliances were 'among equals' or a result of the requirements of military service to an overlord.

The mistake made, however, by those scholars who argue that ethnicity never played a part in Anglo-Celtic warfare, is in their assumption that this could only be revealed by evidence for some pan-Celtic or pan-Anglo-Saxon alliance.²⁶ This need not have been the case; ethnicity could have played a part in any individual battle or engagement, irrespective of whether or not there were combined forces on either side. The lack of evidence that ethnicity formed the basis of any military alliance does not mean that

²⁴ M. Miller, 'Eanfrith's Pictish son', *NH* 14 (1978), pp. 65-6.

²⁵ The inability of the Britons, specifically, to ever unite against an Anglo-Saxon or Norman/English foe has indeed become one of the 'facts' of British history. See Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', p. 345; P. Sims-Williams, 'Celtomania and Celtoscepticism', *CMCS* 36 (1998), pp. 11-12.

ethnicity did not matter at all in pre-Viking foreign relations, a point that is often missed in the literature. If ethnicity is indeed an expression of politics and warfare, then the fact that Anglo-Saxon and Celtic kingdoms had been established by c.600 means that ethnicity could easily have formed the basis of continued political unity and opposition. What is of most note in this regard is the enduring state of hostility between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons, in particular, that is simply assumed by contemporary writers such as Bede, Aldhelm, and Stephen of Ripon, as well as non-contemporaries like Gildas. These writers leave no doubt as to their belief that relations between Anglo-Saxons and Britons were characterised by fear and hatred.²⁷ Indeed, the Anglo-Saxons were not just a military threat to British rulers but also a political one.²⁸ Clearly, there were exceptions to this picture, as has been seen, but the limited evidence for cultural contact between Anglo-Saxons and Britons,²⁹ and the contempt inherent in the Anglo-Saxon term *wealas*, suggest that ethnic differences could be felt 'on the ground'.³⁰ The image of the 'ferocious Pict', irrespective of whether or not this was a mere *topos*, could similarly have filtered down to affect how they were viewed by less sophisticated members of an Anglo-Saxon warband. It is in circumstances of warfare that ethnic designations, if anywhere, will be most acutely felt. Such designations were doubtless particularised on the battle-field more precisely than 'Anglo-Saxon' versus 'Briton', 'Pict' or 'Scot'; a warrior's identification as, for example, a Mercian or a Powysian may have been more likely. Nevertheless, to down-play the role of ethnic difference in warfare between Anglo-Saxons and Celts would demonstrate a limited appreciation of inter-group relations.

Conflict and struggle, especially over long periods of time, serve to deepen ethnic and ultimately national consciousness.³¹ The contest between Anglo-Saxon and British kingdoms, and to a lesser extent Pictish and Scottish, was an important stimulus to their own political and in some cases economic development in the period c.600-800.³² It

²⁶ For example, T. Clarkson, 'The *Gododdin* revisited', *The Heroic Age* 1 (1999), <http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/1/hatf.htm#gododdin>, p. 4; J. Moreland, 'Ethnicity, power and the English', in Frazer & Tyrrell, *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, p. 42.

²⁷ R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London, 1989), p. 10; Snyder, *Age of Tyrants*, p. 249; Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', pp. 516-17.

²⁸ D.N. Dumville, 'The idea of government in sub-Roman Britain', in Ausenda, *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians*, pp. 212-14.

²⁹ This point will be addressed presently (*infra.*, pp. 480-88)

³⁰ T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts 400-1000', in M.J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London, 1995), p. 733.

³¹ P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 8-9.

³² Hines, 'Cultural change and social organisation in early Anglo-Saxon England', p. 83.

was the interests of both Anglo-Saxon *and* Celtic rulers that determined the political landscape of Britain during this period.

Assimilation, Continuity and Social Exchange

The traditional view of Anglo-Celtic relations focussed almost exclusively on their military interaction and ignored other evidence for association and for social and cultural intercourse. In the present investigation, non-bellucose contact between Anglo-Saxons and Celts was therefore evaluated, both in terms of the assimilation of Britons who came to have Anglo-Saxon rulers, as well as the survival of their cultural identity, and in terms of social exchange between Anglo-Saxons and members of independent British, Scottish and Pictish kingdoms. Such matters were addressed in the context of secular as well as ecclesiastical interaction.

The ambiguity regarding ethnicity, that could be said to be avoided when addressing foreign relations between the extant Anglo-Saxon and Celtic kingdoms,³³ re-emerges when the assimilation of Britons within territory newly-controlled by Anglo-Saxons is considered. All of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms under investigation saw the expansion of political control over British regions during the period c.600-800. Of course people were killed in the process of expansion, and newly-acquired land was certainly given as grants, with there being some concomitant Anglo-Saxon settlement. But this does not mean that *all* of the resident Britons in these regions would have been eradicated or moved off or would have chosen to leave.³⁴ Provided that there was enough desirable land which could be granted to followers, monasteries and settlers, it is probable that a sizeable British population remained within western and northern areas. That there were Britons living under Anglo-Saxon control during the period is not in doubt.³⁵

Where the controversy lies is in the fate of these Britons and the survival of their identity and culture. What has been emphasised in the course of this examination is how dimly the Britons are reflected in the source material. This can partly be attributed

³³ *Supra.*, pp. 472-3.

³⁴ M. Faull, 'British Survival in Anglo-Saxon Northumbria', in L. Laing (ed.), *Studies in Celtic Survival* (Oxford, 1977), p. 2, reflecting on the period of Late Antiquity, argues that there is no evidence that any Barbarian tribe adopted a policy of genocide, though the destruction of towns and the massacre of inhabitants is certainly attested in the sources. See P. Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', *CMCS* 6 (1983), pp. 11-12, who cautions that Latin writers had a vested interest in presenting Barbarians as indeed being barbarous.

to the uneven nature of the evidence, and to the restricted interests of the predominantly Anglo-Saxon chroniclers who focussed on the secular and ecclesiastical elites of their society. Much of what is known about the period relies on the account of Bede. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that there is so little evidence relating to what must have been a significant part of the population.³⁶ Where Britons can be identified from the documentary sources as living under Anglo-Saxon control, either as peasants on estates in the west of Northumbria in the seventh century, or living in the west of King Ine's Wessex, they were in positions of relatively low legal status.³⁷ Ine's Code revealed that some Britons were landowners, and this is a point of some significance. However, their *wergilds* and oath-values were only half that of their West Saxon counterparts. The usage of OE *wealh* to describe a Briton also revealed their low status in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxons; that Britons were labelled as 'foreigners' surely had pejorative implications, a point which is underscored by the development in meaning of the term to denote a slave.³⁸ These conclusions are in line with what was discovered regarding the location of *wealh* place-names in Northumbria, which tend to lie either on less attractive land for settlement or in more isolated upland regions and minor valleys, in other words, in areas which suggest a lower social status.³⁹

It can thus be discerned that Britons were accommodated within newly-conquered Anglo-Saxon territory but placed in an inferior social position. The written sources clearly show that there were Britons living within the borders of Wessex and Northumbria in the seventh century; the *wealh* place-names also indicate that there were Britons in the Anglian West Midlands. Yet the Britons were at a relative social disadvantage, even those in Ine's Wessex who owned land or served as horse-riders to

³⁵ This conclusion can be made even without considering the limited evidence of pagan Anglo-Saxon burials in western and northern England. See Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts', p. 730; Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', p. 356.

³⁶ This is an observation which applies in general to the lower classes of early medieval Britain. See H. Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon social structure', in Hines, *Anglo-Saxons*, pp. 148-51; Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', p. 379.

³⁷ Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon social structure', p. 149.

³⁸ Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts', pp. 730-1; R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (London, 1997), p. 60; J. Hines, cited in Dumville, 'The idea of government in sub-Roman Britain', p. 214; Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', p. 514.

³⁹ D. Brooke, 'The Northumbrian settlements in Galloway and Carrick: an historical assessment', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 121 (1991), pp. 314-16; *idem.*, 'The early history of the diocese of Whithorn from its foundations to 1100', in R. McCluskey (ed.), *The See of Ninian: A History of the Medieval Diocese of Whithorn and the Diocese of Galloway in Modern Times* (Ayr, 1997), pp. 43-4; K. Cameron, 'The meaning and significance of Old English *walh* in English place-names', *English Place-Name Society Journal* 12 (1980), p. 30; Faith, *English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship*, pp. 60-1; Faull, 'British Survival in Anglo-Saxon Northumbria', pp. 12-13 & 19-20.

the king. The granting of new land by Anglo-Saxon kings to followers and monasteries has a number of implications about the fate of the original owners and inhabitants. One or more of several scenarios may have occurred here. Anglo-Saxon arrivals may have taken their pick of the prime farming land, with British communities being left to occupy sites or districts which were overlooked. British lords and landowners may have been killed in battle, or in the case of ecclesiastical land-holders forcibly moved off, so that their land could be transferred into Anglo-Saxon hands along with the resident farming populations of tied British peasants or slaves. Other British landowners may have come to terms with their new masters by accepting reduced social status. None of these eventualities is mutually exclusive.

What the limited references to Britons do seem to reveal is a snapshot of the process of their assimilation within Anglo-Saxon society. They indicate a period of time after Anglo-Saxon control was achieved when complete integration had not yet occurred and Britons and Anglo-Saxons could still be distinguished from one another, doubtless by their language and oral culture. But within Anglo-Saxon society, it was obviously a disadvantage to be identified as a Briton.⁴⁰ While Ine's laws should not be extrapolated beyond the limits that such evidence will reasonably bear, his decrees for Britons are not out of place within the corpus of early Germanic legal texts.⁴¹ Indeed, it would have been necessary to be able to make the distinction between an Anglo-Saxon and a Briton, given the difference in their legal and social status. This is a strong indication that ethnicity was something that mattered at a local level, and was not just an abstract concern of the ecclesiastical *literati*.⁴² Under such conditions there would have been considerable pressure for Britons to assimilate and to become Anglo-Saxon.

Was it a matter of choice on the part of those Britons who found themselves living within Anglo-Saxon territory to abandon their identity? The assumption in much of the recent literature concerning the ethnogenesis of Anglo-Saxon identity in the sub-Roman period is that a substantial number of the native Britons who came into contact with the newcomers voluntarily gave up their British identity to become *Englisc*.⁴³ Ethnic

⁴⁰ Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts', p. 733.

⁴¹ P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century, Vol. I Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 105-6.

⁴² T.M. Charles-Edwards, cited in W. Pohl, 'Ethnic names and identities in the British Isles: a comparative perspective', in Hines, *Anglo-Saxons*, p. 34.

⁴³ *Supra.*, p. 474.

identity does have an element of personal choice.⁴⁴ However, the ethnographic processes that produced the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the sub-Roman period were not necessarily the same as those which marked the assimilation of Britons into Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in later centuries. The nascent Anglo-Saxon polities might have emerged as the result of a commingling of Britons with Anglo-Saxons. But this is a different situation from later centuries when kingdoms and identities, both Anglo-Saxon and Celtic, were already formed and perhaps reinforced by generations of struggle. In this regard, the Celtic Britons of the fifth and sixth centuries were different to those of the seventh and eighth.⁴⁵ During these centuries, Englishness was something that was increasingly likely to be imposed rather than embraced.⁴⁶ There were doubtless Britons who decided to make their way within the new social order, but they would have had little choice who their new masters were. In addition, the supposition that Britons voluntarily abandoned their identity for the purposes of upward social mobility can only be taken so far. It is questionable, for instance, whether a British peasant would have necessarily aspired to greater status; more likely, the abandonment of their previous identity by the majority of conquered Britons was a matter of them attempting to ameliorate their relative social disadvantage.⁴⁷ In this sense, successive generations of Britons can be envisaged as losing their 'Britishness', or indeed, their more specific original regional identity.

The assimilation of Britons and the loss of their ethnic identity was not inevitable within the borders of the pre-Viking Anglo-Saxon kingdoms; it had to have been engineered. This point is not given adequate recognition in the secondary literature. Existing arguments regarding the processes of assimilation place the cultural choice only in the hands of the Britons as it was they who 'gave up' their identity. This represents a failure to appreciate, first of all, that ethnicity is not very easy to forsake successfully, and second, that ethnicity is something which emerges out of social interaction.⁴⁸ A change in identity, therefore, requires the complicity and active participation of a whole social system, in this case Anglo-Saxons as well as Britons. It must in some sense have

⁴⁴ Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', p. 523; see also Chapter 1 (*supra.*, pp. 25-8).

⁴⁵ Nor should it be presumed that British society in the fifth and sixth centuries was necessarily homogeneous. There were assuredly differences between 'highland' and 'lowland' zones. See Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', pp. 368-9.

⁴⁶ Dumville, cited in Ausenda, 'Current issues and future directions', p. 420.

⁴⁷ Moreland, 'Ethnicity, power and the English', pp. 46-51.

⁴⁸ J. Hines, 'The becoming of the English: identity, material culture and language', *ASSAH* 7 (1994), p. 49.

been permitted within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, or even required, that Britons should become Anglo-Saxons. It can even be argued that the Anglicisation of Britons became an imperative along the frontier. It is here that any differences between Britons and Anglo-Saxons would have stood out, where the contrast between the peoples would have been most pronounced. Anglo-Saxon kings who expanded their rule over British territory would have been faced with the problem of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural population, with divergent traditions and, more particularly, divergent loyalties. Newly-conquered Britons undoubtedly had more in common, at least initially, with their former compatriots across the frontier than with their new king. Anglo-Saxon rulers would not have tolerated such a situation indefinitely without working these Britons into the new social order and, in essence, making them Anglo-Saxon subjects. The continued resistance of the British kingdoms to Anglo-Saxon expansion, alluded to earlier,⁴⁹ may have even exacerbated this problem and heightened the need for integration.⁵⁰ Thus, the 'otherness' of the Britons was emphasised, as through the Laws of Ine, in order to manufacture a more unified Anglo-Saxon society.

It is in this context that consideration of British cultural continuity along the border needs to be considered. If 'Britishness' was something which came to be discouraged, even implicitly, then there should *ipso facto* be little evidence for the survival of British culture. This is a logical inference which has received insufficient attention in the literature concerning continuity. The continuation of traditions, language, and religion from British to Anglo-Saxon periods would only have been likely to occur in a social context in which the Britons and their culture were perceived as having some status. This was clearly not the case in pre-Viking Britain, as has been shown. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the current investigation has uncovered only limited evidence for cultural borrowing and continuity. The border counties of Anglo-Saxon England, where if anywhere one would expect to find vestiges of British culture, are in many respects as English in their pre-Viking appearance as those farther east and south.⁵¹ Certainly, there are more British place-names as one progresses westwards towards the frontier, but they are still few in number and in the case of Shropshire and Devon are

⁴⁹ *Supra.*, pp. 477-8.

⁵⁰ Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', p. 529.

⁵¹ Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts', p. 729-30; Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', pp. 521-2.

less frequent than farther east.⁵² This last point is particularly significant as it means that the Britons in Ine's Wessex – who were most likely to be found in the west of the kingdom – had little influence on English place-names. Suppression of British culture became more pressing along these frontiers, than say in Cumbria, as both Wessex and Mercia continued to go to war with Britons living in contiguous territory into the eighth century.⁵³ The place-name evidence conforms with the long-recognised fact that British Celtic had very little impact on Old English, particularly compared to the borrowing which occurred in the other direction.⁵⁴ All else being equal, this would suggest a level of contact that was not of sufficient intensity to produce a marked effect on the language of the Anglo-Saxons.⁵⁵ But the profound lack of influence of British Celtic on Old English was certainly also a result of the perceived lower status of the Britons within Anglo-Saxon territory.⁵⁶ This state of affairs represents what Bryan Ward-Perkins calls a 'particularly extreme case of cultural domination'.⁵⁷ And as the British language began to die out within the borders of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the more marginal settlements where it was still spoken became unusual enough to attract *wealh* or *cumbre* place-names denoting the British ethnicity of the inhabitants.

The question of whether any British kingdom or territorial unit retained its identity or continued as a 'going concern' after Anglo-Saxon conquest is in almost every instance bedevilled by a lack of reasonably contemporary evidence.⁵⁸ The kingdom of Elmet

⁵² Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', p. 97; M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), p. 66; *idem.*, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', *ASSAH* 6 (1993), pp. 54-5.

⁵³ Cumbria has a greater number of British place-names, though the period from which they all derive remains controversial. See K.H. Jackson, 'Angles and Britons in Northumbria and Cumbria', in H. Lewis (ed.), *Angles and Britons: O'Donnell Lectures* (Cardiff, 1963), pp. 73-7, 83-4; C. Phythian-Adams, *Land of the Cumbrians: A Study in British Provincial Origins* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 77-87.

⁵⁴ This issue is discussed by Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts', pp. 729-30. Note the efforts of Andrew Breeze to increase the corpus of British-derived words which may have existed in Old English, for example, 'A Celtic etymology for Old English *Deor* "Brave"', in J. Roberts & J.L. Nelson (eds.), *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 1-4; *idem.*, 'The Celtic names of Blencow and Blenkinsopp', *NH* 39 (2002), pp. 291-2.

⁵⁵ In the context of the later Scandinavian influence on Old English, D. Hadley, '"Cockle amongst the wheat": the Scandinavian settlement of England', in Frazer & Tyrrell, *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, pp. 122-3, comments that linguistic influence between peoples requires a period of mutual intelligibility and co-existence, and is dependent upon their level of contact. See also Gelling, 'Why aren't we speaking Welsh?', p. 53.

⁵⁶ Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts', p. 730; Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon social structure', p. 149; P. Sims-Williams, 'Genetics, linguistics, and prehistory: thinking big and thinking straight', *Antiquity* 72 (1998), p. 519.

⁵⁷ Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', p. 526.

⁵⁸ Topographical evidence for the continuity of British or Romano-British estates is typically found in post-Conquest sources only, and its usefulness for the early Anglo-Saxon period often rests on the precarious assumption that systems of land tenure remained essentially unchanged from Roman to

was one instance where a pre-existing British polity continued as an Anglo-Saxon administrative or taxation unit, assuming that is what the entries in the *Tribal Hidage* represent. It would be tempting to suppose the same situation for the other *-sæte* named units found in the West Midlands and in western Wessex, though the problem continues to be in trying to establish a pre-Anglo-Saxon existence for many of these.

It could be hypothesised that the rapid early expansion of Northumbria, as compared to Mercia and Wessex, was in part due to the conquest and subsequent absorption of existing British polities as working wholes. Certain regional differences can be observed in the nature of the British territories over which Anglo-Saxon rule was extended in the pre-Viking period. Wessex and Mercia were established, in the first instance, over parts of the former Roman Britain, and specifically the so-called 'lowland zone'.⁵⁹ However, Northumbria was the only kingdom to then expand into British regions that had either been within the 'highland' or military zone or beyond the borders of the Roman province itself. It is probable, therefore, that Northumbria was able to exploit a range of more coherent British polities which weathered the end of Roman rule far better than the increasingly fragmented and disorganised lowland regions,⁶⁰ and in which taxation or tribute arrangements could be said to have continued after Northumbrian conquest. In this sense, it may be no coincidence that Northumbria was the only region studied in which certain evidence survives of a British polity absorbed as a going concern, namely Elmet. Northumbria was also the only region in which British high-status secular sites such as Bamburgh, Dunbar and Yeavinger, not necessarily all occupied in the sub-Roman period, were used by the newcomers as centres of power. This was a phenomenon which did not occur in Wessex, by way of contrast, where hill-forts such as Maiden Castle, Cadbury Castle and Cadbury Congresbury were ignored as places of rulership.⁶¹ Perhaps the nature of the British population in the north, some of whom would have known no history of Roman rule, was such that the occupation of dominant sites in the landscape was perceived as symbolically necessary for a successful transition of power. A continuous heritage from the imagined British past could, therefore, have been constructed.

Norman periods in Britain. The term 'estate' itself may not even be appropriate for this early period of Anglo-Saxon rule. See Faith, *English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship*, pp. 27-8, for an argument that Anglo-Saxon period estates may have been created from scratch.

⁵⁹ See Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', pp. 355-6, for a recent discussion of the 'lowland' versus 'highland' division.

⁶⁰ Woolf, 'The Britons: from Romans to barbarians', pp. 360-7.

The question of whether continuity from British to Anglo-Saxon periods was authentic rather than constructed applied most obviously in this thesis to the ecclesiastical domain. Christianity in early medieval Europe was one of the most important indicators of identity and avenues for cultural influence. That some form of British church organisation survived in the west and north of Anglo-Saxon England after conquest has become an extremely fashionable argument in the secondary literature, especially amongst scholars pursuing archaeological and topographical evidence. In the current investigation, however, it was found that the evidence marshalled for ecclesiastical continuity is often more intangible and problematic than is generally accepted.

In most instances, evidence for continuity has been found to rely only on coincidences of site use, without continuous occupation being demonstrated; St Mary-de-Lode in Gloucester and Whithorn in Galloway were the only clear exceptions. It has been impossible to distinguish in most cases between reuse as a reflection of the ‘taking over’ of a functioning British church, Christian community or cult site, or reuse as a reflection of ‘conscious archaism’ on the part of the new Anglo-Saxon churches.⁶² This problem is of particular relevance to the use of Roman monuments and villas for Anglo-Saxon church sites. It is probable that more evidence for continuity is found in Wessex than in Northumbria simply because there were more Roman structures there to be reused. Attempting to create a link with the distant Roman past is not the same as continuity. This highlights the importance of a cross-regional perspective in gaining a more balanced view of the evidence. The *eccles* place-names have also been difficult to interpret and do not necessarily reveal anything about the influence of British Christianity on the Anglo-Saxons.⁶³ In this regard, the fixation of some scholars on ecclesiastical continuity from British to Anglo-Saxon rule, and their subsequent search for confirmatory evidence, represents a methodological shortcoming which has blinded them to the broader picture. Henry Loyn’s warning first articulated over forty years ago is still very apposite here – we have to ‘guard against [the] modern tendency to look for Celts under every stone’.⁶⁴

Part of the problem in this area is that continuity protagonists routinely fail to specify exactly what they mean by the term, and fail to identify exactly what would have been

⁶¹ Maddicott, ‘Two frontier states: Northumbria and Wessex’, pp. 28, 42-3. Some of these sites in Wessex became linked with religious practice.

⁶² This excellent phrase derives from Woolf, ‘The Britons: from Romans to barbarians’, p. 362.

⁶³ Dumville, ‘The idea of government in sub-Roman Britain’, p. 208.

passed on. There needs to be more specificity in the literature concerning the degree of continuity that is being investigated in any particular instance. The continued use of a Christian site from the Roman or sub-Roman period into the Anglo-Saxon period, while being more than just 'background noise',⁶⁵ represents the lowest possible level of continuity. A greater degree of survival would be apparent in the continued veneration of a British saint, as this would reveal the persistence of actual institutions. This evidence has been found to be significantly more scarce, admittedly due in part to lateness of the evidence. In regard to Wessex, a handful of putatively early dedications was evaluated, including at Sherborne, which along with Glastonbury appears to have had a British connection in terms of grants from Geraint of Dumnonia, and perhaps Congresbury. Some early dedications were suggested for the West Midlands, but resolving this remains problematic due to the absence of early records. The picture is, rather, one of Anglo-Saxon dominance. As far as the evidence has revealed, there is no obvious difference in church structure between the marginal and central shires of any of the border kingdoms, as one would have expected if there was British influence; nor is there any difference in the pattern of church dedications. If 'Britishness' came to be suppressed along the frontier, it must be asked whether the Anglo-Saxons, and especially their secular and ecclesiastical elites, would have even accepted the conquered *welshic* religion.⁶⁶ The 'Anglicisation hypothesis' elucidated earlier suggests very little. The only known example within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms under study where the cult of a British saint was clearly promoted was St Ninian of Whithorn, and it is important to recognise that in order for this to occur Ninianic tradition was adapted so as to broadcast an ancient Roman orthodoxy for Whithorn, one entirely consistent with a self-conscious Anglo-Saxon church. It has yet to be determined if other churches and monasteries in Northumbria had been located, either by Roman or by Columban missionaries, over existing British cult sites.

The hypothesis of the adoption of Christianity by West Midland Angles due to influence from their British neighbours stands out from this general view. One way to resolve

⁶⁴ H.R. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest* (London, 1962), p. 12.

⁶⁵ J. Blair, 'Churches in the early English landscape: social and cultural contexts', in J. Blair & C. Pyrah (eds.), *Church Archaeology: Research Directions for the Future* (London, 1996), p. 9.

⁶⁶ P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the origins of the *Gens Anglorum*', in P. Wormald, D. Bullough & R. Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983), p. 101. Some qualification could be made here regarding the unwillingness of the Anglo-Saxons to accept the culture of the 'lower-class' Britons; the Goths, for example, appear to have been converted by slaves and prisoners. See the discussion in Dumville, 'The idea of government in sub-Roman Britain', pp. 214-15.

this anomaly would be simply to reject it as speculation based entirely on an absence of evidence. However, it may have been the case that the course of events ran differently in the West Midlands, as it was buffered from Irish/Columban and Roman missionaries until a relatively late date by the pagan giant of Mercia. In these circumstances, the sharing of beliefs at a local level as 'folk religion' may have occurred, and taken place regardless of the nature of political control in the region and without the sanction of the British clergy in Wales. This may have been facilitated by the variety of Anglo-Saxon peoples who came to live in the West Midlands and who ultimately created the range of different regional polities that were in evidence. Alternatively, the period when this conversion is said to have occurred, anywhere between c.550 and 650, could have been before the Anglicisation of the frontier became an imperative for Mercian kings; indeed, this was when rulers such as Penda were to be found in alliance with British kings of contiguous independent kingdoms.

This raises the question of whether the Anglicisation of Britons was a process that necessarily occurred from the beginning of the period studied in this thesis. The textual references to Britons in Anglo-Saxon territory derive only from the second half of the seventh century, suggesting that assimilation was still in train as Anglo-Saxon kingdoms continued to expand into British regions. Circumstantially, the limited evidence for continuity would suggest an earlier date for their acculturation, but any sense of Britishness might as easily have been swamped by later policies. The reforms of Theodore from c.670, the first churchman who can accurately be called an archbishop of the whole Anglo-Saxon Church,⁶⁷ were significant in emphasising the 'otherness' of the non-orthodox Britons, and Scots/Irish for that matter.⁶⁸ Aldhelm, Stephen of Ripon, Bede and Felix all attest to the growing disdain felt for the Britons and their Christianity through the course of the seventh and then eighth centuries. Continued tension with neighbouring British kingdoms, especially in the West Midlands and Wessex into the eighth century, and the prolonged insulation of the church in Wales from Roman practice, means that in these regions the division between Britons and Anglo-Saxons would have become more sharply defined. British Christianity in Wales is likely to have been a symbol of their resistance to the expansionist ambitions of Mercian kings such as Æthelbald and Offa.⁶⁹ But even in Northumbria, there was

⁶⁷ HE IV.2. See also Dumville, cited in Ausenda, 'Current issues and future directions', p. 444.

⁶⁸ Charles-Edwards, 'Wales and Mercia, 613-918', pp. 96-7.

⁶⁹ L. Quensel von-Kalben, 'The British Church and the emergence of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms', *ASSAH* 10 (1999), p. 95.

warfare in the eighth century with a more distant British kingdom, Strathclyde, and Bede certainly promulgated an unfavourable view of the Britons generally. As suggested earlier,⁷⁰ British identity and culture could not have endured indefinitely under these conditions, and ultimately it was engulfed by the political, economic and social dominance of the Anglo-Saxons. Thus, British identity survived only in the independent kingdoms, but not within Anglo-Saxon England where it was systematically rejected.⁷¹

It should not be concluded, however, that the Anglicisation of the frontier was something that occurred as a single coordinated policy; rather it evolved according to the political and social circumstances of the individual Anglo-Saxon border kingdoms and their different periods of expansion and warfare with the Britons. Periods of cooperation with independent British kingdoms, which nearly all occurred in the seventh century,⁷² would have also affected internal developments within the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. It does not appear that any of these alliances resulted in a discernible influence on the culture of the Anglo-Saxons, and this includes the refusal on the part of the British church to take part in the evangelisation of the Anglo-Saxons. In this regard, social exchange between independent British and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the pre-Viking period must also be viewed in the context of the perceived lower status of the Britons within Anglo-Saxon territory, and the generalised military and political threat posed by the Anglo-Saxons. Notwithstanding the eventual capitulation of the British church in Wales to the Roman Easter in 768, the British kingdoms became increasingly isolated throughout the pre-Viking period.

Social exchange and interaction between Anglo-Saxons and Britons contrasted most obviously with relations between Anglo-Saxons and Scots. Contact with these northern Celts predominantly concerned Northumbria, which was the only Anglo-Saxon kingdom to interact with all three Celtic peoples. After the only recorded instance of warfare between Dalriada and Northumbria in 603, relations between the kingdoms was exemplified more by amicability than hostility. A significant degree of cultural exchange occurred across the kingdoms, most obviously demonstrated by the

⁷⁰ *Supra.*, pp. 484-5.

⁷¹ Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', p. 529.

⁷² Instances of cooperation reviewed in the thesis include: the exile of Hereric into Elmet c.604-616, the British alliances of Penda c.630-655, the marriage of Oswiu and Rhianmellt of Rheged c.634-642/5, the involvement of two British bishops in the consecration of Chad, c.655, and the discourse between

introduction of Columban Christianity into Northumbria in the 630s, which occurred as a result of the exile of the sons of Æthelfrith to Dalriada and their exposure to Scottish/Irish culture. The influence of Iona and Ireland was widely felt in Anglo-Saxon England, with the nominal Christianisation of over half of the kingdoms accomplished by Columban and Irish missionaries and their trainees.⁷³ Even after the Synod of Whitby and the reforms of Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury, which were designed to abolish non-orthodox practice, contact with Iona continued, for example through Aldfrith and St Ecgberht. Anglo-Saxon clerics continued to travel to Ireland, and Irish clerics and students could still be found in Anglo-Saxon England well into the eighth century. To be sure, Bede argued that the Columban clerics were backward and ignorant, due to their remoteness; but he nevertheless reported on their contribution to the Christianisation of Anglo-Saxon England.

This situation clearly differs from that concerning Anglo-Saxons and Britons, where the evidence for social exchange was significantly more limited, and the very existence of Britons within Anglo-Saxon territory often barely discernible.⁷⁴ Even allowing for the biases of writers such as Bede, Columban and Irish clergy had a profound effect on the culture of several Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, for which there was no British parallel. Why should Anglo-Saxons have so conspicuously accepted an aspect of the culture of the Scots but not of the Britons, even if they ultimately abandoned it? It is probable that the reason lies in the geographic distance of the Scots from Anglo-Saxon territory.

Dalriada did not share a border with an Anglo-Saxon kingdom; Scots and Anglo-Saxons, therefore, never faced each other across a frontier. Nor did the Scots ever come under direct Anglo-Saxon rule. Because of this, there was never the 'ethnic pressure' felt between the two peoples that there was between Anglo-Saxons and Britons. Ethnic identification and categorisation occurs most readily when the object of differentiation is close at hand.⁷⁵ This was not the case for Anglo-Saxons and Scots; as stated, Bede even commented on the remoteness of Iona. Thus, with the Scots, the Anglo-Saxons were not confronted with the immediate and local contrast of a different *gens* in the same sense as they were with the Britons, with whom they shared a border which ran

Aldhelm and Geraint of Dumnonia, c.673-709. This last example is the only one which extends into the eighth century.

⁷³ D.N. Dumville, "'Beowulf' and the Celtic world", *Traditio* 37 (1981), p. 110.

⁷⁴ N.J. Higham, 'Britons in northern England in the early middle ages: through a thick glass darkly', *NH* 38 (2001), p. 5.

⁷⁵ P.J. Geary, 'Ethnic identity as a situational construct in the early middle ages', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 113 (1983), p. 23.

the length of England.⁷⁶ Apart from the Irish and Columban clerics in Anglo-Saxon England and the Anglo-Saxons who travelled to Dalriada and Ireland, there was limited opportunity for interaction between the two peoples, fewer 'contact situations', and thus a reduced likelihood of ethnic differentiation becoming an issue. The Scots did not, therefore, become the 'other' for the Anglo-Saxons during the pre-Viking period – the object of comparison against which their ethnic commonality developed – in the way that the Britons did.⁷⁷

In this overall context, the Picts fall between the Britons and the Scots in their level of social interchange with the Anglo-Saxons. The Picts shared some of the experiences of the Britons in that Pictland ultimately abutted an Anglo-Saxon kingdom, Northumbria, across the barrier of the Forth, and for several decades in the seventh century some of the southern Picts were subject to Northumbria's direct rule. There was greater potential for direct contact between Northumbrians and Picts than between Northumbrians and Scots, and they were more frequently to be found at war with each other. The Picts were, therefore, portrayed as the barbarian 'other' in some contemporary writings, such as the *Life of Wilfrid* and the *Continuatio Bedae*, just as were the Britons. But in other respects, the Picts were like the Scots in that they lived in a region remote from the Anglo-Saxon heartlands. The Picts did not come to share a border with Northumbria until the second quarter of the seventh century, and even then this 'zone of contact' was nowhere near the scale of that between the Anglo-Saxon and British kingdoms. There was not, therefore, the same need for ethnic differentiation. Beyond the period of Northumbrian hegemony in Pictland in the second half of the seventh century, when there was arguably a period of anti-Northumbrian sentiment as well as resurgent Pictish pride after the battle of Dunnichen, Picts and Northumbrians were frequently engaged in some manner of social exchange. Northumbrian clerics were invited into Pictland, Northumbrian exiles found refuge there, Northumbrian and Pictish kings allied against a common foe, and, as mentioned, Northumbrians and Picts shared the only Anglo-Celtic peace treaty for which there is a pre-Viking record.⁷⁸ There is a much greater sense of the Picts as being a people who were respected and even feared by Anglo-Saxon writers than there is of the Britons.

⁷⁶ Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts', p. 733.

⁷⁷ R.R. Davies, 'The peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400, 1. Identities', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th Series 4 (1994), p. 8; Moreland, 'Ethnicity, power and the English', pp. 24-5, 40-1.

⁷⁸ *Supra.*, p. 477-8.

Summary of Conclusions

The degree of social exchange and cultural borrowing that occurred between Celts and Anglo-Saxons in pre-Viking Britain was moderated by the relative distance of the different peoples from one another. Anglo-Saxons were less willing to accept aspects of British culture because it was perceived as indicating lower status *and* because the contrast between the two peoples was something that was concrete and immediate. Living at close quarters, the differences between Anglo-Saxons and Britons were more stark and more routinely emphasised due to a higher frequency of contact.⁷⁹ The Scots, on the other hand, lived at a greater distance from the Anglo-Saxons, and while there may have been a perception of Anglo-Saxon superiority, the contrast which the Scots posed was more intangible than tangible. The Picts also posed a more intangible point of comparison than the contiguous Britons, but with a sharper edge than the purely spiritual one presented by the Scots; they were after all the archetypal savage foe. One must be wary of merely relying on an absence of evidence, but the relative lack of cultural influence from the Britons is telling. It seems that those Celts who had the greatest intensity of social exchange with the Anglo-Saxons were not the neighbouring Britons but the distant Scots and Picts. There were exceptions, but nevertheless this provides a useful way of conceptualising relations between the Anglo-Saxons and Celts of pre-Viking Britain.

This last point reveals a final permutation in the paradox of Anglo-Celtic interaction, which has been a continuing theme throughout the course of this thesis. Interaction between Anglo-Saxons and Celts in pre-Viking Britain is a phenomenon which is impossible to categorise and describe in any essentialist or summary manner. Celts and Anglo-Saxons did not interact with one another as two competing groups, but as diverse peoples with different interests, concerns and experiences. In this regard, further research remains to be done to illuminate the nature of Anglo-Celtic relations. The study of continuity is arguably the area which needs most revision; future work must include a consideration of what the term is taken to mean within a given research context. In addition, researchers must specify more explicitly the nature of the evidence required to demonstrate genuine continuity. Archaeologists will doubtless continue to uncover more evidence regarding the early years of Anglo-Celtic contact; but further thought needs to be given to how the material evidence relates to the historical and

⁷⁹ Moreland, 'Ethnicity, power and the English', p. 41.

ethnographic processes that were in play in early medieval Britain. Ethnicity, therefore, remains an important concept worthy of further examination. The current thesis has not considered the economic links that might be revealed in archaeological evidence for the trade of goods.⁸⁰ Roger White has already examined the evidence for Celtic goods in Anglo-Saxon graves,⁸¹ but there is more that could be done here, and there is no comprehensive survey of Anglo-Saxon goods found in otherwise Celtic contexts.

Further research could also include a work of synthesis for the ninth and tenth centuries. David Dumville's O'Donnell Lectures examined this issue,⁸² but their wider publication has been forthcoming for twenty-five years now, and subsequent research and source criticism will need to be incorporated.⁸³ An examination of this period could include a more deliberate focus on Anglo-Celtic attitudes. The assessment of attitudes has been hampered in the current examination by the limited view that could be gained of the Celtic perspective. The more extensive British/Welsh sources of subsequent centuries have been studied in the context of the development of Welsh nationalism,⁸⁴ but the picture they reveal of how the Anglo-Saxons were viewed needs further work. An analysis of the ninth and tenth centuries could also involve a consideration of the effect on Anglo-Celtic interaction of a further intrusive group of people, namely the Vikings. Did the arrival of the Vikings provide a common enemy that united Celt and Anglo-Saxon? Or were the new invaders more likely to find common cause with the Anglo-Saxons or with the Celts? What was the effect of the emergence of a single English kingdom in the tenth century on relations with the Celts?

⁸⁰ B. Eagles, 'The archaeological evidence for settlement in the fifth to seventh centuries AD', in M. Aston & C. Lewis (eds.), *The Medieval Landscape of Wessex* (Oxford, 1994), p. 28.

⁸¹ R. White, *Roman and Celtic Objects from Anglo-Saxon Graves: A Catalogue and an Interpretation of their Use* (Oxford, 1988).

⁸² D.N. Dumville, 'England and the Celtic World in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries', delivered in 1978 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Eng. d. 3536, fols. 70-135).

⁸³ For example, Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts', pp. 703-36; E.P. Hamp, 'The Laud Herbal Glossary and English-Celtic contacts', *CMCS* 18 (1989), pp. 113-16; D. Jenkins, & M.E. Owen, 'The Welsh marginalia in the Lichfield Gospels, Part I', *CMCS* 5 (1983), pp. 37-66; *idem.*, 'The Welsh marginalia in the Lichfield Gospels, Part II: the "Surexit" Memorandum', *CMCS* 7 (1984), pp. 91-120; S. Keynes, 'On the authenticity of Asser's Life of King Alfred', *JEH* 47 (1996), pp. 529-551; H.R. Loyn, 'Wales and England in the tenth century: the context of the Aethelstan charters', *WHR* 10 (1980-1), pp. 283-301; K.L. Maund, 'The Welsh alliances of Earl Ælfgar of Mercia and his family in the mid-eleventh century', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 11 (1988), pp. 181-90; D. Pelteret, 'Slave raiding and slave trading in early England', *ASE* 9 (1981), pp. 99-114; P. Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989); F.C. Suppe, 'Who was Rhys Sais? Some comments on Anglo-Welsh relations before 1066', *Haskins Society Journal* 7 (1997), pp. 63-73; S. Walker, 'A context for "Brunanburh"?' in T. Reuter (ed.), *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages* (London, 1992), pp. 21-39.

⁸⁴ For example, D.N. Dumville, 'The historical value of the *Historia Brittonum*', *Arthurian Literature* 1986, pp. 1-26; P. Sims-Williams, 'Historical need and literary narrative: a caveat from ninth-century Wales', *WHR* 17 (1994-5), pp. 1-40; *idem.*, 'The death of Urien', *CMCS* 32 (1996), pp. 25-56.

This is a fitting place to leave the current examination: at the advent of the Viking Age. The pre-Viking period witnessed a massive cultural and political change in Britain brought about by the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons and the subsequent development of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. But the period saw relations between Anglo-Saxons and Celts being played out in a unique political and ethnic milieu, one which was arguably sheltered from the intrusion of multiple competing peoples and interests, as occurred on the Continent. The arrival of the Vikings provided the first significant disruption to this state of affairs, and Britain after c.800 became a different place. The Viking Age, therefore, represents a new phase in the history of Anglo-Celtic interaction in Britain.

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NOTE: This bibliography does not replicate those works which were listed in the abbreviations section (pp. xii-xv).

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